

GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL  
101 Callahan Drive  
Alexandria  
Independent City  
Virginia

HABS VA-1431  
*HABS VA-1431*

PHOTOGRAPHS

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL

HABS No. VA-1431

**Location:** 101 Callahan Street, Alexandria, City of Alexandria, Virginia

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial is located at latitude – 38.807566, longitude – 77.066088. The coordinate represents a point at the center of tower. It was obtained using Google Earth imagery, dated August 28, 2010. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial location has no restriction on its release to the public.

**Present Owner:** George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association

**Present Occupants:** George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association

**Present Use:** Museum, meeting space, office space, banquet hall, and auditorium

**Historian:** Kate M. Kocyba, Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow, 2010

**Significance:** Constructed between 1922 and 1932, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial is a unique monument built and paid for by the freemasons of the United States to honor George Washington. The unprecedented building project, which occurred during what might be considered a golden age of Freemasonry in America, brought together the independent Grand Lodges of the states and territories in a rare initiative among freemasons having a national scope. The practical origins of the building were in creating a repository and museum for the materials and artifacts associated with George Washington. These objects, known as “Washingtonia,” had been left to the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 whose first Master, upon being chartered in 1788, was Washington. Very quickly, this local initiative gained broader interest and support among freemasons and was expanded to celebrate George Washington in a more complete manner.

George Washington had previously been viewed and memorialized primarily as commander in chief of the Continental Army and as the first President of the United States. Paralleling trends in contemporary scholarship in and public interest about Washington, the freemasons sought to present and celebrate a more complete picture of the man. This goal in part focused on how aspects of Freemasonry had shaped his character and influenced his actions taken during the Revolution and during the establishment of the nation. Alexandria, Virginia was the obvious location for such a monument, as it was home to a Masonic lodge that Washington helped charter and it also possessed a collection of Washingtonia. Alexandria was also the town where he attended church and maintained a business office; and it was located along a modern-day “pilgrimage route” created when a trolley line connecting Washington, DC, and Mount Vernon opened in 1896.

The freemasons established the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association for the purpose of realizing this goal. The Association met for the first time in 1910, but it would be another decade before they would be in the position to move purposefully forward with the project, at the beginning of a transformative decade in American architecture. The Association hired the well-known New York firm of Helmle & Corbett to design the memorial, which was one of the leading offices specializing in tall commercial buildings. Harvey Wiley Corbett was the principal for the project and he devised a striking memorial for a dramatic hillside site overlooking Alexandria.

The resulting eclectic building combined neoclassical austerity common to contemporary American memorials and civic buildings with the excitement and energy of modern skyscraper design. The appropriately strong and sober podium contrasts with the dynamism of the set-back tower crowned by a pyramid and beacon, exhibiting strong Art Deco influences and clearly reflecting the strengths and interests of the architect. The skyscraper memorial was felt to be a modern and fitting adaptation of an ancient lighthouse form, yet it also situated the building within the 1920s mania optimistically exploring the potential of high-rise buildings for virtually any function. As with many of the tall buildings rising throughout the country, the monolithic reinforced concrete and granite behemoth not only looked modern, but was also realized using modern construction technology and engineering. When taking into consideration the impetus and deep meaning of the memorial, the high-profile building site, and the period's preoccupation with notions of "modernism," the George Washington Masonic National Memorial was an extremely successful architectural solution to a multifaceted design problem.

## Part I: Historical Information

### A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1922-32. Three events determined the date range. In February 1922, the George Washington Masonic Memorial Association (hereafter Association) voted to employ the architectural firm, Helmle & Corbett to design the building. The groundbreaking ceremony, officially marking the beginning of construction, followed in June 1922. The end date of 1932 marks the year that the shell of the memorial was completed and dedicated.
2. **Architects and builders:** The George Washington Masonic National Memorial (hereafter GWMNM) is a building that can clearly defined as an individual work by Harvey Wiley Corbett; however, the project also involved his firm, Helmle & Corbett, which was based in New York, New York; a consulting architecture firm, Osgood and Osgood based in Grand Rapids, Michigan; a landscape architecture firm, Olmsted Brothers based in Brookline, Massachusetts; and a prominent local contractor, Cranford Paving Company, Inc., based in Washington DC.

### Helmle & Corbett

#### Frank J. Helmle

In 1921, the architectural firm, Helmle & Corbett, received the commission to design the GWMNM. The firm's senior partner, Frank J. Helmle (1869-1939), was born in Marietta, Ohio in 1869. He moved to New York for his architectural training, studying at Cooper Union and the School of Fine Arts of the Brooklyn Museum. In 1890, he joined the firm of McKim, Mead & White and stayed for a year before opening his own office.<sup>1</sup> Prior to entering into a partnership with Harvey Wiley Corbett in 1912, he had created a firm with Ulrich Huberty and designed several bank buildings in Brooklyn. The firm also designed the Italian Renaissance Revival Boathouse (1905) and the Tennis House (1910) in Prospect Park, Brooklyn.<sup>2</sup> Helmle's versatility as a designer extended to designs for modern, fireproof, multistory buildings having simplified decoration. For example, in 1910 he designed the Bien Building, a loft located on Thirty-Eighth Street on Manhattan.<sup>3</sup>

In 1912, Helmle partnered with Harvey Wiley Corbett and the firm took on larger projects both in the United States and abroad. In 1916, the firm designed the functionally innovative Bush Tower on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in Midtown Manhattan, New York for the owners of Brooklyn's vast Bush Terminal. Three years later, Irving T. Bush hired Helmle & Corbett to design a trade center, known as Bush House, in London. Helmle & Corbett was asked to propose a design for the GWMNM in 1921.<sup>4</sup> While designed by Corbett, the building showed Helmle's influence through its fireproof reinforced concrete structure. The proposed memorial also kept within

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<sup>1</sup> "F. J. Helmle Dead: Retired Architect," *New York Times* 16 Jul. 1939: 32.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Morrone, *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publishing, 2001), 416.

<sup>3</sup> "Thirty-Eighth Street Loft," *New York Times* 6 Nov. 1910, Sec. RE: 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association" (hereafter **Executive Committee Minutes**), 10 Oct. 1921, in Executive Committee Meetings Binder (hereafter **ECMB**), 9, George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association Archives (hereafter **GWMNMA Archives**), Alexandria, Virginia.

Helmle's design principle: "simplicity should be the watchword."<sup>5</sup> Its exterior, especially the tower, consists of a streamlining of overall form, emphasizing line and height.

After 1922, with the GWMNM underway, Helmle engaged himself on other projects. In his final years at the firm, Helmle worked on the Henry Stambaugh Memorial Auditorium in Youngstown, Ohio (1926) and the Horace Bushnell Memorial Auditorium in Hartford, Connecticut (1929-30; now the Bushnell Center for Performing Arts). He retired in 1928 and took up amateur golfing. He died on July 15, 1939.<sup>6</sup>

### **Harvey Wiley Corbett**

Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954), the son of physicians Elizabeth Wiley Corbett and Samuel James Corbett, was born in San Francisco, California in 1873. He attended the University of California-Berkeley and, in 1895, graduated with a degree in engineering. Corbett entered the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1896 where he studied under Jean-Louis Pascal and immersed himself in a design process based on mastery of past architectural styles. In 1900, he received his diploma from the École and was awarded medals for ability in architecture, mathematics, modeling, and freehand drawing. In the same year, Corbett designed and oversaw the construction of the administration building for the Compagnie des Tramways Électriques in Geneva, Switzerland. Following travels in France, Italy, and England, Corbett returned to the United States and worked as a draftsman for Cass Gilbert through 1903.<sup>7</sup>

In 1903, Corbett formed a partnership in New York with F. Livingston Pell during which he made his presence known as a designer. The first two major commissions received by Corbett & Pell were the Maryland Institute (College of Art) in Baltimore, Maryland (1905-08) and the Springfield (Massachusetts) Municipal Group (1908-13); both commissions were winning entries in architectural competitions.<sup>8</sup> The Municipal Group, which paired neoclassical temple fronted buildings with a tall Italian Renaissance tower, reflected Corbett's background in Beaux-Arts design and planning.

While working on these two projects, the firm also entered another competition sponsored by the Brooklyn Masonic Guild. The competition required the architects to design a Masonic Temple for a site at the corner of Clermont and Lafayette Avenues in Brooklyn to house local Masonic lodges and York Rite bodies including the Knights Templar. Fourteen New York area firms entered the competition, and Pell & Corbett, in association with Lord & Hewlett, won the commission.<sup>9</sup> They created a 100'-square building, utilizing neoclassical elements and polychrome terracotta in an inventive manner. The creativeness of the design brought national attention to the building and its architects. In 1909, a critic wrote in the magazine *Architecture*,

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<sup>5</sup> Frank J. Helmle, "Architectural Expression in Concrete," *Architectural Forum* 34 (Jan. 1921): 15.

<sup>6</sup> "F. J. Helmle Dead: Retired Architect," *New York Times* 16 July 1939, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Corbett's biography developed from: "Resume of Harvey Wiley Corbett, Associate Architect for Brooklyn College," City University of New York—Brooklyn College, accessed online, 6 Aug. 2010 (<http://dspace.nitle.org/bitstream/handle/10090/9277/>), and Carol Willis, "Corbett, Harvey Wiley," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 1, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1982), 451.

<sup>8</sup> Willis, 451.

<sup>9</sup> William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 134.

I do not recall any other building which expresses so completely the high purpose and aims of a great secret society like the freemasons, and it is as perfectly thought out in every particular as it is perfect in general conception. The color of the brick work is delightful, the method of using colored terra cotta in the columns, the capital, the belt courses and in the cornice is the best of modern times; one is tempted to say of all time. The building is, I suppose, Greek. I say this grudgingly, for it is so thoroughly modern in its handling that it seems to me really American of the highest type rather than a derivative from some ancient architecture.<sup>10</sup>

For Corbett, this Masonic building helped to establish his architectural career and put his name on the national stage. For what was likely the first time, he was viewed as trying to define a modern American architectural mode. The success of this design is further underscored by a number of similar Masonic buildings constructed across the country in the succeeding years. This commission also allowed Corbett to form a connection with Freemasonry, which would be lasting and serve him over the course of his career.

After this period of early, notable commissions, Corbett ended his partnership with Pell and entered one in 1912 with Frank J. Helmle, which would last until Helmle's retirement in 1928. During their partnership, Corbett's architectural expression further developed and blossomed. He did not work in any one particular stylistic mode as none dominated in the United States in the early-twentieth century. As with many of his contemporaries, he also thought deeply about modernism in American architecture and shared these insights, not just through his designs, but through lecturing and writing as well. By the time of his partnership with Helmle, he was already teaching design at the New York School of Applied Design for Women and at Columbia University's School of Architecture. His approach to modern architecture focused on the potential of the skyscraper, but also incorporated elements of zoning and accommodated various modes of transportation, automobiles, airplanes, and even zeppelins.

In time, Corbett became known, in particular, as the architect-champion of the skyscraper. Helmle & Corbett received a number of commissions for multistoried commercial buildings. In 1916, the firm was hired to design the thirty-story Bush Tower for a site on 42<sup>nd</sup> street in Midtown Manhattan for the owners of Brooklyn's vast Bush Terminal. This building debuted Corbett as an influential skyscraper designer and theorist. From this point onward, Helmle & Corbett designed many skyscrapers and multistoried structures in America and abroad.<sup>11</sup> Corbett also started to write articles emphasizing the modern needs of industrialized America. For Corbett, the potential of steel construction did not just allow taller buildings, but ones that also emphasized verticality. It was his opinion that the vertical was "more attractive than the horizontal," and America was "a new country, unhampered by tradition, free to move in almost any direction dictated by commerce or social innovations;" based on these ideas, Corbett saw skyscrapers as the logical American architectural expression.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Architectural Criticism," *Architecture* 20 (Jul. 1909): 97, as transcribed in Moore, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Willis, 451.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey Wiley Corbett, "New Heights in American Architecture," *Yale Review* 17 (Jul. 1928): 691-92. The vision of America as a "new country" had been established for over a century, but was still current. Corbett, who had spent four years in Europe studying architecture, felt that American architecture was young and, therefore, unrestricted by tradition.

Corbett whole heartedly supported New York's 1916 zoning law, which called for skyscrapers with set-backs to allow for more light at street level; the building silhouette would become an iconic image of the 1920s. In August 1923, he wrote an article for *Pencil Points*, an architectural drafting periodical, that explained how the zoning legislation required architects to be more creative with their designs to suit both the regulations and the demands of the owner. He saw the legislation as a call for American ingenuity and his own designs provided a viable model for application. Corbett's writings, coupled with Hugh Ferriss's illustrations, helped to quell the controversy over skyscraper designs by advocating set-back skyscrapers as the way of the future.

Helmle & Corbett more than likely received the commission from the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association because of Corbett's reputation for skyscraper design. The Association interviewed several architecture firms at the end of 1921, and hired Helmle & Corbett to create a preliminary model and plans for presentation to the Association at its next annual meeting. On February 24, 1922, the Association hired the firm to design the GWMNM with Corbett as the principal for the project. He remained involved with the design and its execution until his death in 1954.

After Helmle's retirement in 1928, Corbett was associated with various architects on two notable skyscraper developments. He and D. Everett Waid designed the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company North Building in 1928 on a site immediately adjacent to the insurance company's iconic Met Life Tower (1909; National Historic Landmark, 1978), which was the tallest building in the world until 1913. As planned, the North Building would rise 100 stories and reclaim the record, but the Great Depression intervened and only the base of thirty stories was ever completed. Corbett was also senior partner in a firm with Wallace K. Harrison and William MacMurray, which lasted until 1935 when Harrison departed.<sup>13</sup> Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray was one of three architectural firms initially involved in the development of Rockefeller Center (National Historic Landmark, 1987).

Given Corbett's interest in modern American architecture, it is not surprising that he became involved in two World's Fairs having a particular emphasis on technology. He was the chairman of the Architectural Commission for Chicago's "A Century of Progress International Exposition (1933-34) and also chaired the Advisory Committee of Architects, which formulated the theme for the New York World's Fair (1939-40). Corbett's fascination with projects having a massive scale extended to several large civic projects. He and Charles B. Meyers provided the design for Manhattan's Criminal Courts Building (1938-41). After World War II, Corbett was the chief architect for the design and construction of Amsterdam Houses (1947-48), thirteen apartment buildings intended to provide up-to-date accommodation for low-income citizens and, notably, was one of New York's pioneering integrated public housing initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

Corbett was active in New York's architecture scene through his death on April 21, 1954. He was an accomplished practitioner and was recognized during his lifetime with numerous honors and awards. Just a month before his death, Corbett received one from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

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<sup>13</sup> Corbett remained senior partner in a firm with MacMurray. In 1941, the firm's name was changed from "Corbett & MacMurray" to "Harvey Wiley Corbett Associates." Willis, 451.

<sup>14</sup> "Harvey Corbett, Architect, Dead," *New York Times* 22 Aug. 1954: 29.

### **Osgood & Osgood**

Sidney J. Osgood (1845-1935) and S. Eugene Osgood (d ca. 1952), his son, formed a partnership in 1904 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Sidney Osgood was a son of a builder from Aurora, Maine, and, in 1876, moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan where he established an architecture firm that would later include his son. S. Eugene Osgood received a degree in architecture from Cornell University.<sup>15</sup> S. Eugene Osgood was a freemason and, because of this, Osgood & Osgood constructed many Masonic buildings in the United States and Canada. Indeed, the firm became one of the principal ones for Masonic buildings and, by 1923, Osgood & Osgood had designed and built fifteen Masonic temples. In general, commissions for Masonic buildings allowed for a relatively high amount of creativity and eclecticism, and, for better or for worse, were guided by no dominant stylistic convention. S. Eugene Osgood observed in a 1923 letter to David Lynn, Architect of the U.S. Capitol, "Masonic building show a woeful lack of co-ordination and scientific analysis."<sup>16</sup> Osgood called for a coordinated approach to Masonic design that linked a working knowledge of Freemasonry with architecture, a goal that was never comprehensively attained.

As Osgood & Osgood had experience with the design and construction of Masonic buildings, and S. Eugene Osgood was a freemason, the Association hired the firm as consulting architects in 1921; all decisions made by the Association in connection with the design and construction of the GWMNM went through S. Eugene Osgood. While working with the Association, Osgood & Osgood's services were secured for a number of other, monumental Masonic buildings throughout the country. In 1930, the firm was working on a \$2 million Masonic Temple in Providence, Rhode Island (never completed), acted as the consulting architects for another, costing \$3 million, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and designed and supervised the construction of a \$1 million Masonic Home in Alma, Michigan.<sup>17</sup> Although the firm did not exclusively limit itself to Masonic commissions, they were a major source of Osgood & Osgood's work.<sup>18</sup> J. Claude Keiper, the secretary-treasurer of the Association noted in 1924, "Osgood and Osgood had probably the most extended experience in connection with Masonic buildings of any architects in the United States."<sup>19</sup>

### **Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects and Carl Rust Parker, Associated**

In 1897, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (1822-1903) retired after a prestigious career of promoting and establishing the profession of landscape architecture within the United States. He passed the business to his son, Frederick ("Rick") Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957), and stepson, John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920), and the duo renamed the firm the "Olmsted Brothers." The partnership flourished and at the time of John Charles Olmsted's death in 1920 the firm had received approximately 3,500 commissions, ranging from large-scale exposition grounds to residential

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<sup>15</sup> S. Eugene Osgood to Andrew W. Mellon, 12 Mar. 1931, Osgood & Osgood folder, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>16</sup> S. Eugene Osgood to David Lynn, 14 Nov. 1923, Osgood & Osgood folder, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Osgood to Mellon, 12 Mar. 1931.

<sup>18</sup> Architects were particularly impacted by the Depression, and the economic downturn was the likely impetus for a direct appeal for work made in 1931 by Osgood to Andrew W. Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury. Mellon was affiliated with the Association and a past member of its Advisory Board. Osgood to Mellon, 12 Mar. 1931.

<sup>19</sup> J. Claude Keiper to James A. Rogers, 25 Mar. 1924, GWMNMA Archives.



gardens. Rick Olmsted became the senior partner of the largest architecture firm in the world, and he hired several associates to manage the firm's numerous commissions, using the system of oversight established by John Charles Olmsted. This allowed Olmsted to devote more of his time to consulting on issues related to city planning, conservation, and the preservation of the American landscape.<sup>20</sup>

The Olmsted Brothers were asked to propose a landscape design in 1921, around the same time that Helmle & Corbett were contacted by the Association regarding the commission. The Olmsted Brothers believed it was best to be part of the early stages of the design as the firm could work more closely with the architects in creating a comprehensive design. The Association accepted both the building and landscape designs in February 1921. Three months later, on May 27, 1922, the Association signed a contract with the Olmsted Brothers that met the Association requirements for a landscape architect who was also a freemason:

it is further understood [by the Olmsted Brothers] that Carl Rust Parker, a member of the Masonic Fraternity, hitherto associated with us, shall continue to be so associated during the term of this agreement, and shall act with full authority as our direct representative in connection with all matters pertaining to this work, and that his name shall appear on all plans and documents prepared by us.<sup>21</sup>

Carl Rust Parker (1882-1966) was born in Andover, Massachusetts in 1882 and attended Phillips Academy where, as a secondary student, he received his only formal training in landscape architecture. After graduating in 1901, he joined the Olmsted Brothers in Brookline, Massachusetts, as a draftsman, designer, and project supervisor. He remained there until 1910 at which time he opened his own firm in Portland, Maine and became a prolific designer of residential and civic landscapes. In 1917, Parker moved to Washington, D.C., and, as part of the war effort, worked for the Camp Planning Section of the War Department's Construction Division and the Town Planning Division for the Department of Labor's Housing Corporation.<sup>22</sup>

In 1919, Parker returned to the Olmsted Brothers, primarily working in Maine on the Colby College and the University of Maine campuses. As an associate for the firm, Parker devised an initial landscape design for the GWMNM in 1921, which never included a full planting scheme; only the terracing, grass seeding, and some miscellaneous plantings were executed. During the 1940s and 1950s, Parker acted as the Olmsted Brothers representative for Kohler Village a planned industrial community in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. Parker became a full partner in the Olmsted Brothers in 1950. He retired in 1961 and died five years later.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> National Association for Olmsted Parks, "Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.," and "John Charles Olmsted," both accessed online, 12 Aug. 2010 ([www.olmsted.org](http://www.olmsted.org)); The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.," and "John Charles Olmsted," both accessed online, 12 Aug. 2010 ([www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)).

<sup>21</sup> Contract between the Olmsted Brothers and the GWMNM Association, 27 May 1922, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>22</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Biography of Carl Rust Parker," accessed online, 12 Aug. 2010 ([www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

### **Cranford Paving Company**

Brothers Joseph H. Cranford and Percy Cranford ran the Cranford Paving Company, which was incorporated in 1889. Cranford Paving specialized primarily in concrete and asphalt work. In 1889, their bid was accepted by Washington, DC, for the resurfacing of the part of Pennsylvania Avenue NW between Seventh and Seventeenth streets NW.<sup>24</sup> This high-profile contract undoubtedly led to many others for roadwork throughout the District. The Cranford Paving Company was involved in the important construction of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge (Taft Bridge, 1897-1907), carrying Connecticut Avenue NW over Rock Creek Park, and the bridge carrying 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW over Piney Branch (1907-10).<sup>25</sup>

Newspaper accounts suggest that Cranford Paving dealt primarily with the construction of infrastructure; however, in 1922 they were contracted by the Association to excavate the site for the GWMNM. The company next bid successfully on the granite foundation base and, because of the quality of their work, Cranford Paving was contracted to pour the entire monolithic reinforced concrete structure and simultaneously face it in granite. The Cranford Paving Company was involved with the construction from 1922 through 1932, the year in which the shell was completed and dedicated and also the year that the depressed economy forced the Cranford Paving Company out of business.

3. **Original and subsequent owners and occupants:** George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association.
4. **Contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers:** The construction of the GWMNM was done through a process of direct hires, contract bids, and, sometimes, solicitations. The board of directors of the Association authorized the creation of an executive committee, chaired by the Association president and composed of several appointees. The executive committee was often advised by the building architect (Helmle & Corbett) or the consulting architect (Osgood & Osgood) about decisions concerning the building's design, materials, and construction.

The building architect and consulting architect were hired directly by the Association, whereas the majority of the construction and materials contracts were made through the bidding process, and most often going to the lowest bidder. Not all the contracts went out to bid. After successfully bidding for the contract to set the foundation stone and, presumably, completing the job to the satisfaction of the Association, the Cranford Paving Company received all subsequent structural work for the GWMNM. Cranford Paving sometimes subcontracted out some of the work. At times, companies solicited work from the Association, particularly for interior details such as stained glass, lighting, and furniture.

The list below developed through numerous records in the GWMNMA Archives. These records relate to a variety of individual jobs completed throughout the building for the duration of its construction. The use of asterisks indicate the involvement of known freemasons.

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<sup>24</sup> "Resurfacing the Avenue," *Washington Post* 8 Aug. 1889: 8.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Davis and Amy Ross, "Connecticut Avenue Bridge," HAER No. DC-6, and "Sixteenth Street Bridge," HAER No. DC-29, both Historic American Engineering Record, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1992.

Helmle & Corbett, New York, New York	
Harvey Wiley Corbett*	building architect
Olmstead Brothers, Brookline, Massachusetts	
Carl R. Parker*	landscape architect
Osgood & Osgood, Grand Rapids, Michigan	
S. Eugene Osgood*	consulting architect
Moran, Maurice & Proctor, New York, New York	consulting engineers (soil tests)
David J. Howell & Son*, Washington D.C	engineer (soil tests)
Cranford Paving Company, Washington DC	
Joseph H. Cranford* and Percy Cranford*	contractor

**Contractors, Subcontractors, and Suppliers (known contributions)**

Maine & New Hampshire Granite Company,	
Redstone, New Hampshire	Pink Conway granite
American Seating Company, New York, New York	auditorium seating
A.W. Lee, Washington, DC	metal lath, furring and plastering
Benjamin F. Shaw Co., Wilmington, Delaware	heating/venting, boiler house and tunnel
Baldwin-Stewart Electric Co., Hartford, Connecticut	electrical
Burkett Lightning Rod Co., Ohio	lightning protective equipment
Cassidy Company, Inc., Long Island City, New York	light fixtures
Concrete Steel Company, New York, New York	steel reinforcement
DC Engineering, Co., Washington, DC	
H.E. Huntsberry, president	plumbing
Eagle Bronze Works, Mount Vernon, New York	bronze doors
G. Fred Coles	carving caps and polishing columns
Georgia Marble	marble
Harry C. Louder	steel setting
Hilgartner Marble Co., Baltimore, Maryland	marble stairs
New York Roofing Co., New York, New York	
John Faison*, president	roofing
Otis Elevators	elevators
Smoot Sand & Gravel, Alexandria, Virginia	sand and gravel
Sterling Bronze Co., Inc, Long Island City, New York	bronze fittings
Turner Construction Co.	concrete work
W & J Sloane	auditorium curtains, drapes and shades, furnishings
Woodward & Lothrop, Washington, DC	carpet

**Contractors, Subcontractors, and Suppliers (unknown contributions)**

A. L. Ladd	Doubleday Hill Electric Co.
Alexandria Iron Works	E. E. Simpson & Brother
C. F. Armiger	E. J. Murphy Co.
Chamberlain Weather Strip Co.	E. Van Noorden
Corson & Gruman Co.	Ernest Davis & Sons
D. J. Sargent Granite Co.	Frank Michelback

George H. Robinsons & Sons  
Henry H. Meyer Co.  
James B. Lambie  
J. & H. Aitcheson  
Moorman Drayage Co.  
National Electric Supply  
Newell Cole Co.  
O. M. Scott & Sons  
Rudolph & West Co.  
S.F. Dyson & Brother  
Samuel Miller & Co, Washington DC  
Sargent & Company

S.F. Dyson & Brother  
Southern Oxygen Co.  
Southern Sign Service  
W. H. May & Sons  
W. W. McCallem  
Wallace Herring  
William H. Jackson Co., New York, New York  
William A. Smoot & Co, Alexandria, Virginia  
Worth Hulfish & Sons

## 5. Original plans and construction:

### A Masonic Memorial for George Washington

The origin of GWMNM lies within Alexandria (Virginia) Lodge No. 22. When George Washington died in 1799, it was the recipient of several donations from his family because he was the lodge's first Master when it was chartered in 1788.<sup>26</sup> Although Washington was only Master of this lodge for twenty months, he nurtured a lasting bond and continued to recognize the importance of the fraternity. Knowing his strong ties to Freemasonry, it is unsurprising that Martha Washington donated the first Washington object to the lodge: the mantle clock in the room where Washington died, stopped at the time of his death. This clock established the precedent for other family members and friends to contribute objects related to Washington to the lodge.<sup>27</sup>

Over the next several decades, the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 received numerous objects—some related to Freemasonry, some not—Masonic used or owned by George Washington. In time, the lodge did not have enough room for all of them and, in 1818, it petitioned the Alexandria city council for assistance.<sup>28</sup> In response, the city gave the lodge the third floor of the west wing of the city hall for use a museum of “Washingtonia.”<sup>29</sup> For the next fifty years, the relics were located in this space near the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22; however, in 1871, a fire destroyed much of city hall and the courthouse. Most of the Washingtonia was, fortunately, spared.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Established in 1783, the Masonic lodge in Alexandria changed its charter from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to the Grand Lodge of Virginia five years later. Following Washington's death in 1799, Alexandria Lodge No. 22 was renamed the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 in his honor. During the twenty-month period he was Master of lodge, Washington was elected the first president of the United States, the only person elected president while serving as Master and one of fifteen presidents who were freemasons.

<sup>27</sup> Charles H. Callahan, *A Memorial to Washington the Mason to be Erected at Alexandria Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: Kohn & Pollock, Inc., ca. 1920), (9).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, (32). At the time, the lodge was meeting in the upper story of Alexandria's courthouse.

<sup>29</sup> “Washingtonia” refers to any objects owned or related to George Washington; Charles H. Callahan likely coined the term. Ibid, (6).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, (32).

A new city hall and courthouse were built in 1874 and the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 again rented space from the city council for its meetings and storage of the Washingtonia. In 1896, a trolley line connecting Washington, DC, with Mount Vernon via Alexandria was completed. As a result, the lodge became a stop on the “pilgrimage route” to Washington’s home and it received more and more requests to see the Washingtonia, although the lodge remained inaccessible to the general public until 1907. A combination of the tourist demands and concerns over the susceptibility of the relics to damage or loss spurred the lodge’s decision to pursue the construction of a purpose-built structure for the storage, display, and protection of the priceless objects.

Initially, the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 perceived the protection of Washington’s objects as a local Masonic challenge, but in 1908, Oscar Lawler, Assistant Secretary of the Interior and past Grand Master of California, suggested that the lodge should make a national appeal to the fraternity to assist in this endeavor. This suggestion generated debate within the lodge about how to proceed, but it ultimately provided the catalyst for the GWMNM as the lodge resolved to propose the creation of a memorial to George Washington. Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 introduced this proposal on February 22, 1910—George Washington’s birthday—at a meeting of the American Grand Masters. By the end of this conference, the Grand Masters had called for the formation of a national association to raise funds for the construction of a “Masonic Temple as a memorial to George Washington, under the auspices of Alexandria-Washington Lodge, No. 22, A.F. & A.M. of Alexandria, Virginia.”<sup>31</sup> The conference concluded by setting a date one year later—February 22, 1911—for the first meeting of the Association.<sup>32</sup> With these resolutions, the interrelationship of Freemasonry and George Washington would be cemented together on a national scale.

### **The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association**

The first official meeting of the Association was held in 1911 at the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 in Alexandria, Virginia. It was made up of representatives from twenty-four grand lodges in the United States and its territories, together establishing the Association’s principal objective: to raise funds for the construction of a Masonic memorial in honor of George Washington. Thomas J. Shyrock, Grand Master of Maryland, was elected the first president of the Association, a position he held until his death in 1918. Under Shyrock’s guidance, the Association created its constitution and, within a year, its ways and means committee had developed a fundraising plan.<sup>33</sup>

The ways and means committee proposed a “charter honor roll” having a goal of getting 1,000 freemasons to subscribe \$100 each to become a life member of the Association.<sup>34</sup> Shyrock saw the \$100,000 as the nucleus to inspire other freemasons to donate to the project. Although, in theory, the plan was sound and several prominent freemasons participated, for example President

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., (36). The memorial that the Association intended to build was referred to as a “Temple,” meaning a building constructed by the freemasons. There was initially no intention to include a space for regular lodge meetings.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Prior to the formation of the Association, the limited funds raised by the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 were held within that body.

<sup>34</sup> *Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of the GWMNMA* (1912), 4, GWMNMA Archives.

and future Chief Justice William Howard Taft, the endeavor was not fully successful. By 1917, after five years, the Association had raised just \$87,000 through this scheme.<sup>35</sup>

The initial fundraising went slowly because there was some confusion about the objective. Many Masonic lodges thought the funds were intended for a new lodge for Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22. Better communication helped the Association to rectify this misunderstanding. The other issue in raising money came from indecision about fundraising schemes. At the 1917 convention an alternative fundraising proposition was made that would create a tiered donation format ranging from five dollars to one hundred dollars or more. The Association rejected the proposal and only a single, broad resolution was made at the convention: to construct a memorial building at a cost of not less than five hundred thousand dollars.<sup>36</sup>

The Association's one resolution in 1917 was realized by its second president, Louis A. Watres, the Grand Master of Pennsylvania.<sup>37</sup> Watres presided over the Association for nearly twenty years. Under his leadership, the Association was incorporated in 1922, which facilitated the raising of funds nationally. With assistance of an appointed executive committee, he oversaw the realization of a Masonic memorial honoring George Washington at a cost of nearly \$3 million at the time of its dedication in 1932.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Selection of the Site**

At the same time the Association began serious fundraising, it was also looking for a site that not only was in an appropriate location, but also had a connection with George Washington. The Association began discussing the site at its annual convention in 1915. With three-quarters of the initial \$100,000 in-hand or pledged, it was considering property that had become available. The parcel was located next to Christ Church, the church where Washington had rented a pew and, on occasion, attended. A small appointed committee went and inspected the property and recommended not to take immediate action, instead passing the decision to the ways and means committee.<sup>39</sup>

By the next annual convention, the site had been chosen, but not the one next to Christ Church. A location on Schuter's Hill next to the city's reservoir had become the favored location, undoubtedly because the property had already been purchased for a Masonic purpose. President Shyrock noted the gift at the 1916 convention, as recorded in the minutes: "referring to the matter of a site for the proposed memorial, he [Shyrock] announced that since the last meeting, the brethren of Alexandria had purchased and paid for a magnificent plot of ground for the

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<sup>35</sup> *Minutes of the Seventh Annual Convention of the GWMNMA* (1917), 12, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. A few years earlier, the Association envisioned a \$1 million minimum, but the slow pace of fundraising resulted in a more conservative goal while still being open to raising more.

<sup>37</sup> President Shyrock died on February 3, 1918. At the Eighth Annual Convention (1918) Watres was unanimously elected. *Minutes of the Eighth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1918), 7, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>38</sup> *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1932), 25, GWMNMA Archives. After 1932, phases of continued construction and maintenance amounted to an additional \$1 million. In 1945, it was estimated that it would cost over \$5 million to complete the interiors and landscaping. Assistant Secretary-Treasurer of the Association to Karl J. Mohr, "Estimates to Complete Memorial," 1 May 1945, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>39</sup> *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1915), 4-7, GWMNMA Archives.

erection of the Memorial.”<sup>40</sup> The “Washington Monument Association” had owned land on Schuter’s Hill as early as 1908, which was dedicated by deed “into the subdivision known as George Washington Park.”<sup>41</sup> It was intended by the this local association that the land would be used for the construction of a lodge and be a place for the display and proper curatorial care of the Washingtonia.<sup>42</sup> By 1915, with the project having a national scope, Charles H. Callahan procured ten lots from the Washington Monument Association for the construction of a memorial to George Washington.<sup>43</sup> The magnificent location on top of Schuter’s Hill was seen by the Association as the perfect location because it “was so splendidly situated that the Memorial Building would be visible from points for miles from Alexandria, and from the city of Washington and from the site itself could be seen the Capitol Building, the Washington Monument and many others of the public buildings.” The site also had added meaning because it had been “the site once selected by Thomas Jefferson for the erection of the Capitol of the United States.”<sup>44</sup> With deep meanings and an incomparable site, the Association probably did not take long to accept the land donation for its “temple” to George Washington.

### **An Evolving Preliminary Concept**

The Association passed a resolution at its annual convention in 1917 to form a committee to investigate the issue of building design. The committee held meetings and even hired a photographer to document the grounds, but made no significant progress since, as reported at the 1918 convention, they had been given “no definite instructions” about how to proceed.<sup>45</sup> The establishment of this committee was likely premature and the issue of a design was temporarily set aside so that the Association could focus its energies on fundraising, as noted in the report of the “Special Committee of Finance.”

We believe that when the time finally comes for the erection of the Memorial, all those Grand Jurisdictions which have participated in the financial program should have a voice in determining the size and style which the proposed building shall have, and until that time has arrived, and the employment of architects shall become the business of the Association, no prospectus should be attempted other than that already specified in the Constitution and By-Laws of this Association.<sup>46</sup>

Two more years would pass before Association raised enough funds to begin talking seriously about the building. At its 1920 convention, the organization empowered its president, secretary,

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<sup>40</sup> *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Convention of the GWMNMA* (1916), 6, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>41</sup> See: *Abstract of Title to George Washington Park*, 15 Mar. 1921, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>42</sup> William Adrian Brown, *History of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial: 1922-1974, Half Century of Construction* (1980), 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Abstract of Title to George Washington Park*, 15 Mar. 1921. There was a provision in the deed stating that a memorial needed to be constructed within ten years or the land reverted to the ownership of the City of Alexandria.

<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1916), 6, GWMNMA Archives. The attribution that Thomas Jefferson suggested to George Washington that Schuter’s Hill become the site for the Capitol does not seem to have any documented support. More than likely this was a local myth that eventually came to be understood as fact, adding to the prestige of the site and the historical value of Alexandria to the establishment of the national capital. The story was not refuted or even diluted during the memorial’s long period of fundraising and construction. *Minutes of the Seventh Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1917), 17, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1918), 6, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

treasurer, and ways and means committee to move forward with the design and construction of a memorial costing at least one million dollars.<sup>47</sup> This decision was accompanied by guidelines that outlined the spatial and functional requirements for the building: space for the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 and other Masonic bodies in Alexandria; a fireproof repository for the Washingtonia collection; a Masonic library; an auditorium (Memorial Theater) for 1,500 people; and administrative offices for the Association and “any other Masonic Association of national scope and character.”<sup>48</sup>

To begin this stage of the design process, the Association provided the building committee with a budget of \$25,000. One year later the committee presented tentative plans to the Association for its consideration, which, despite the grant, were produced at no cost. The identity of the architect is no longer known and the plans, likewise, are not known to be extant, but the minutes for the 1921 convention note that the proposed building was classical in concept, being “after the order of the Temples built in ancient days.”<sup>49</sup> No vote was taken on the design and it was passed to the board of directors for further study, which convened for the first time immediately after the convention on February 22, 1921. The board established an executive committee that initially consisted of Association president Louis A. Watres, who chaired the committee, Association secretary-treasurer J. Claude Keiper, Melvin M. Johnson, Charles Homer, William Daniels, and William Farmer. The board’s executive committee “was authorized and directed to consult regarding the plans for the Memorial, the style of building desired, the matter of employment of an architect and other similar matters.”<sup>50</sup> The board suggested that they communicate with architecture professors from the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, Harvard University, Syracuse University, and Cornell University in order to make recommendations about the design of the building.

When the executive committee first met on May 3, 1921, its members concluded that the universities were not able to provide satisfactory insight about the design, and proceeded to debate the merits of a “Colonial” or classical building, for its association with George Washington, or a Gothic one, believed to better represent Freemasonry.

After a thorough discussion, it was moved and carried that the Chairman be authorized to obtain a preliminary report from two prominent architects, who would be the best representatives of the two styles of architecture named, said report to cover the question of their adaptability to the Memorial Building, the cost of construction and maintenance, and such other questions as might be valuable as aids in deciding the style of the building.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1920), 13, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1921), 7, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>50</sup> *Minutes of the First Board of Directors Meeting of GWMNMA*, 22 Feb. 1921, Board of Directors Meetings Binder (hereafter **BDMB**), 2, GWMNMA Archives. The four meetings of the board of directors held between February 1921 and February 1922 are titled “first” through “fourth.” On April 29, 1922, the meeting numbers began again at “first” because the Association had incorporated.

<sup>51</sup> *Minutes of the First Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 3 May 1921, ECMB, 3-4, GWMNMA Archives. The use of “Colonial” probably referred more broadly to designs having classical symmetry and Georgian architectural elements.



The executive committee ultimately approached three architects/firms for opinions on the matter, Cram & Ferguson of Boston, John Russell Pope of New York, and Paul P. Cret of Philadelphia, who “were all to the effect that the classical style of architecture should be selected for the building.” Based on these findings, the board of directors voted in September 1921 to adopt a classical style for the memorial. It then authorized the executive committee to employ an architect—preferably Cret, followed by Pope, then Cram & Ferguson—and a landscape architect.<sup>52</sup>

The executive committee was also interviewing several other firms, among them Helmle & Corbett. The New York firm was known for its high-rise buildings and, accordingly, its preliminary sketch of October 15, 1921 consisted of a tower that stepped back three times as it rose from a broad podium.<sup>53</sup> Its most obvious, and perhaps obligatory, nod to classicism was the peculiar temple-like cap for the tower. The concept must have excited the executive committee as they commissioned Helmle & Corbett on October 21, 1921 to devise a contour map of the site, and produce a more refined concept drawing and model of their proposal to be considered and voted on at the Association’s upcoming convention in February 1922. In the intervening months, Helmle & Corbett, with Harvey Wiley Corbett as principal, met with the executive committee and S. Eugene Osgood, the Association’s consulting architect, a number of times about the building and grounds, whose total estimated cost had risen to \$5 million.<sup>54</sup> Among the issues discussed was the height of the tower, which at first dominated the composition, minimizing the presence of the entrance portico and, in the opinion of Osgood, driving up construction cost projections. In response to these concerns, Helmle & Corbett agreed to modify the tower, and the final versions of the site plan, presentation drawing, and model were accepted by the executive committee on February 11 and the board of directors on February 20.<sup>55</sup> The following day the Association’s general body voted unanimously “that the model and plans presented be approved in principle.”<sup>56</sup>

The design that the Association approved “in principle” was a refined version of Helmle & Corbett’s original concept, consisting of a podium and tower.<sup>57</sup> The podium featured a front portico containing the main entry, which was inspired by the Parthenon reached by a set of wide stairs. Above the podium, a three-staged tower rose out of a solid plinth. The inspiration for the tower was a restoration drawing of the lighthouse at the Roman Port of Trajan at Ostia by the artist, M. Garvez.<sup>58</sup> Each stage of the tower was defined by solid corner piers framing openings subdivided by columns. It was intended that the first two stages would be enclosed, with

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<sup>52</sup> *Minutes of the Second Board of Directors Meeting of GWMNMA*, 12 Sep. 1921,” BDMB, 4, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Harvey Wiley Corbett, *First Sketch of the George Washington Masonic Memorial*, 15 Oct. 1921, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 26 Nov. 1921, ECMB, 15, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>55</sup> *Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 11 Feb. 1922, ECMB, 19, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>56</sup> *Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1922), 17, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Although the design essentials were approved, the actual development of the proposed building could, and would, be modified in the future by the architect and the executive committee.

<sup>58</sup> “Port of Trajan at Ostia, Restoration by M. Garvez,” *Pencil Points* 5 (Jul. 1924): 60-61.

windows fitted between the columns, and the third one left as an open observation platform. This uppermost stage was topped by a gable roof with antefix at the ends of the ridge.

### **Functional and Aesthetic Development**

When the Association approved the design in 1922, they authorized the board of directors to act on its behalf in realizing Corbett's design for the memorial.<sup>59</sup> The board of directors, in turn, delegated this task to the executive committee who worked directly with the architects and contractors on decisions about the design and construction. While proposed changes or issues identified by the committee were initially supposed to be presented to the board for approval, this occurred less and less often as the project progressed. A core group within the executive committee, which included Louis A. Watres, J. Claude Keiper, Melvin M. Johnson, and Charles H. Callahan, essentially directed the project on behalf of the Association.<sup>60</sup>

Corbett had to balance the memorial nature of the building along with the various functional requirements set at the 1920 convention, including local Masonic lodge space, a museum, a library, an auditorium, and administrative offices.<sup>61</sup> His concept for the interior of the podium placed a columned Memorial Hall to George Washington at the center with the other rooms and spaces arrayed around it. In the tower, the lowest stage had an identified purpose at this point in the design development: "a museum, in exact reproduction of the Lodge room in which Washington presided as Master, will be provided and in it will be deposited many memorabilia of George Washington."<sup>62</sup> Space in the second stage of the tower remained unassigned and the third stage was planned as an open observation tower.<sup>63</sup> Although the basic design was well enough established by September 1922 for the Association to break ground, some significant issues remained to be worked out.

Corbett and the executive committee continually collaborated on modifications to the design. The first modification occurred in September 1922 when the committee received bids for the building's stone facing from granite, marble, and limestone suppliers.<sup>64</sup> Although Corbett had specified limestone, in October he visited several buildings in the Washington, DC area along with the consulting architect and the contractor. The group weighed the qualities and character of the stone types in several Washington area buildings and recommended the use of granite to the committee because of its durability; unfortunately, granite facing would add \$500,000 to the cost of the building. At the Association's 1923 meeting, Watres, Corbett, and Osgood made a

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<sup>59</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 6, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Around 1930, the board of directors gave the Association president Louis A. Watres a greater level of authority. He could make decisions without their consent in order to speed up construction, landscaping, land appropriation towards the end of, hopefully, reducing costs.

<sup>61</sup> *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1920), 13, GWMNMA Archives. Period publications did not report that the building requirements set by the Association included lodge space for Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 as this was viewed by many as not properly Masonic and, indeed, such a perception had actually hindered the fundraising campaign early on.

<sup>62</sup> Keiper to the *Homiletic Review*, "Description of the George Washington Masonic Memorial," 24 Nov. 1932, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Louis A. Watres, "The George Washington Masonic National Memorial," *The Builder* 8 (Jul. 1922): 196-97.

<sup>64</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 9 Sep. 1922," ECMB, 32, GWMNMA Archives.

presentation arguing that a monument to the memory of Washington needed to, like the Egyptian pyramids, last in perpetuity.<sup>65</sup> It was not enough that the building have a monolithic structure of reinforced concrete, but should be sheathed in granite to assure it would survive for centuries. The Association found the argument persuasive and the facing was officially changed from limestone to granite.<sup>66</sup>

Finalizing the design of the tower also became a major preoccupation for Corbett and the executive committee. In explaining the significance of the tower to the concept, Louis Watres quoted Corbett in a July 1922 article appearing in *The Builder*, a Masonic magazine:

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial is primarily a memorial to George Washington, the Man and the Mason. Its form is inspired by the great towers built in the ancient days of Greece and Rome to make the entrances to their harbors and from whose summits permanent burning flares that could be seen for miles at sea, guided the mariner on his way. The great tower of the Memorial represents to the world at large the guiding spirit of Washington in statesmanship, and his revered precepts which for all time will set an example by which the Ship of State may direct its course.<sup>67</sup>

Watres's quoting of Corbett suggests that the architect had embraced the vision of the Association—a monument to “proclaim to people from every land the story of Washington’s association with and affection for our great Fraternity.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, Corbett’s proposal for a tower, a concept that seems to have set him apart from his peers, was as much an image of modernity as antiquity.

At a meeting in December 1923, the executive committee requested complete plans, working drawings, and specifications for the tower to be submitted in advance of the Association’s next convention. Corbett agreed to the request under the condition (which was granted) that he still have some flexibility in modifying the design in order to produce the most “perfect an edifice as possible.”<sup>69</sup> Corbett then proceeded to outline his proposed modifications to the tower. It was still stepped back in three stages, but the columns in the openings reduced in number and repeated on each level, resulting in a subtle change in proportions emphasizing the tower’s verticality. Implementing the classical orders in a canonical manner, Corbett used Doric on the bottom stage, Ionic on the middle, and Corinthian on the top. The most striking change to the design was the introduction of a stepped pyramid above the third stage, understood by contemporaries as having Aztec origins and a popular form and motif in Art Deco buildings.<sup>70</sup> This pyramid terminated in a beacon that provided a decidedly modern interpretation of the “burning flare” of ancient lighthouses. Altogether, the changes Corbett proposed for the tower transformed a somewhat quirky stack of temples into a sleek and undeniably modern form

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<sup>65</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 16, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>66</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 16, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Watres, “The George Washington Masonic National Memorial,” 196.

<sup>68</sup> *Minutes of the Seventh Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1917), 17, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>69</sup> *Minutes of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 1 Dec. 1923, ECMB, 63, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>70</sup> “Port of Trajan at Ostia, Restoration by M. Garvez,” 60; Harvey Wiley Corbett to Keiper, “Slide List,” 7 Jul. 1924, GWMNMA Archives.

having a profile not unlike the new commercial towers rising in New York and elsewhere in the United States (fig. 1).

The dramatic changes to the tower resulted in considerable deliberation by the executive committee and, eventually, reluctant acceptance. The executive committee's uncertainty about the changes may have prompted Corbett to solicit John Russell Pope's opinion on the design. Writing to Corbett in February 1922, Pope stated:

Your plans to me are full of fine memorial spirit both exterior and interior, and particularly in respect to handling the housing of the figure of Washington which appealed to me as being extremely dignified and worthy.

In style – in the classical feeling of your detail and mass, I think you have hit close to the spirit of the time of George Washington. The plan of Washington by L'Enfant was resurrected in the McKim and Burnham plan of Washington in 1901. This plan of Washington undoubtedly covers the question of character and style which more weight than any opinion I can think of. The spirit of the plan is, as I feel it, that all memorial buildings in Washington should be of the classical style as interpreted by our forefathers in the time of L'Enfant and Jefferson.

As to the suitability of the monument to the site, your drawings recall forcibly many of the designs for projects of about that time, and I think, that your conception is admirably related to this particular site.<sup>71</sup>

Even with Pope's praise there was still criticism from some members of the Association and debate dragged on through 1924 about the proposed revisions. In October, J. Claude Keiper wrote to Corbett about Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol Building, observing that "it is a wonderful design of a tower, at least so it looks to me."<sup>72</sup> Keiper never liked Corbett's concept for the tower and, in particular, did not care for the new pyramidal top. Corbett must have taken Keiper's observations as criticism as he replied:

if I were not convinced that what we are proposing to do will be the most impressive building of a Memorial character ever yet designed, I would be as ready as anyone to change from the original conception, but the longer I work over this problem, the more firmly am I convinced that we are absolutely on the right track.<sup>73</sup>

This communication made clear Corbett's confidence about the design. While it is not certain whether Keiper supported the changes, he seems to have deferred to Corbett's expertise and vision and the debate about the changes came to a conclusion.

The following year, the Association published the revised plan in a promotional brochure outlining the entire design program.<sup>74</sup> The ground floor of the podium contained a large central

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<sup>71</sup> John Russell Pope to Corbett, Letter, 4 Feb. 1924, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>72</sup> Keiper to Corbett, 31 Oct. 1924, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>73</sup> Corbett to Keiper, 5 Nov. 1924, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>74</sup> *The George Washington Masonic National Memorial*, (New York: Kalkhoff Co. for the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, 1925).

Assembly Room surrounded by administrative offices and support spaces such as restrooms with a large auditorium at the building's rear. The first floor featured a central Memorial Hall flanked by two lodge rooms, the "replica" lodge room, support spaces, and the upper level of the auditorium (fig. 2). In the tower, the third, fifth, and seventh levels were unassigned and labeled "mezzanine;" the fourth level was designated a "states memorial," the sixth level a library, the eighth level a museum, and the ninth for "observation" (fig. 3). Two elevators, with canted shafts and tracks, and a spiral stair serviced all levels of the tower.

Additional modifications to the plan arose during construction, but these were, for the most part, minor and the building was more or less completed according to the final design released in 1925. The most significant change after 1925 pertained more to the structure of the pyramid rather than its visual profile. Corbett envisioned the pyramid as a steel framed space enclosed with stone. In December 1929, electric chimes weighing six tons arrived for installation in the pyramid. The structure had to be redesigned to accommodate the chimes, a process that lagged on into the summer of 1930 in part because the architect and board of directors disagreed about how to clad the tower.<sup>75</sup> Corbett had initially specified solid stone cladding for the pyramid, but was considering a redesign utilizing artificial stone to reduce the load, a material that the Association voted to prohibit.<sup>76</sup> In the end, alternating bands of Conway pink granite and openings fitted with louvers/screens were used for the pyramid, a solution that reduced the weight of the pyramid and also allowed the chimes to more fully resonate.<sup>77</sup>

### Construction and Engineering

It took ten years from the time the Association approved the model and plans in 1922 to a point where it could be considered "completed." The project faced several challenges that impacted the duration of construction, including: financing, issues with the site, and the process of construction. The Association had resolved to proceed with construction only as funds were made available to pay for the contracts and, while avoiding the complications of taking out loans, the approach also generated a great amount of anxiety. At the 1923 convention, President Watres declared:

there must never come a time when we have not the money on hand to fulfill that contract. I am saying this in order to point out to you, as the Board wants to point out to you, the absolute need of getting the money in fast enough to meet the requirements; for if it ever stops coming in, our Memorial might be like the Washington Monument which stopped midway and stood unfinished for thirty years before work was recommenced.<sup>78</sup>

The Association ultimately avoided a cessation in work on the GWMNM; however, construction frequently slowed because funds only trickled in, limiting the number of active contracts.

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<sup>75</sup> Cranford Paving Company to Helmle & Corbett, 15 Feb. 1923, Cranford Letters, GWMNMA Archives; Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, *Structural 10<sup>th</sup> Floor Plan and Sections (REV)*, 10 Jul 1930, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>76</sup> *Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 22 Feb. 1930, ECMB, 94, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>77</sup> Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, *Detail of Louvers Job 814 Sheet 567*, 18 Aug. 1930, Blueprint Room, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>78</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 8, GWMNMA Archives. The Association did not want a memorial lingering embarrassingly unfinished for decades as was the case with the Washington Monument in the previous century.

Weather was also problematic. Even with sufficient funds, most of the construction could only be done seasonally between March and December. Intensive site preparation delayed the beginning of construction until September 1922, seven months after the plans were approved. Schuter's Hill had to be graded to an elevation of 107 feet from a peak of 138 feet before foundation work could begin.<sup>79</sup> Although the Cranford Paving Company had been awarded the contract for the foundation in July 1922, no work could begin before an engineering firm evaluated the soil.<sup>80</sup> This work was completed by the New York firm of Moran, Maurice, and Proctor and their findings required a redesign of the foundations. According to Daniel E. Moran, except for a thin capping of gravel several feet deep, Schuter's Hill was entirely composed of clay. Test bores found that the clay was of two types: hard and dry clay to a depth of about twenty feet over a core of soft and malleable clay.<sup>81</sup> In response to these findings, Corbett had to reconsider how the loads would be distributed through the building, delaying the foundation work.

Corbett's initial design focused the load of the tower at the center of the building, an approach that would have settled unevenly in the clay-based soil.<sup>82</sup> His revisions redistributed the loads more evenly throughout the building and increased the maximum depth of the foundations from 112 feet to 115 feet.<sup>83</sup> Excavation on the foundations finally began on September 11, 1922; two days later the foundation drawings were complete and a three-inch protective mat of concrete had been poured to create a layer between the clay subgrade and the reinforcing steel.<sup>84</sup> This favorable pace of work slowed while waiting nearly a month for delivery of the full order of steel. Corbett's new foundation plan required a continuous pour of concrete around the reinforcing steel to create fifteen interconnected monolithic slabs that would resist bending in the clay subgrade.

To accomplish the ambitious pouring program, the Cranford Paving Company built a concrete plant and chuting tower on-site to the south of the construction area. Starting on November 6, 1922, the Cranford Company poured the slab sections continuously for 302 hours in six runs. The contractors began with the center section, which was left to set for seven days before the forms were removed and the outer sections poured. This method created construction joints that also acted as expansion joints in the completed building. The smallest slab section was 401 cubic yards and the largest was 696 cubic yards. The entire process required a total of 8,794 cubic yards of concrete with gravel aggregate and 719 tons of steel. The thickness of the slab varied from 9'-6" feet thick at the center under the tower to 2'-0" thick under the exterior walls of the podium. Once the slab had set, the Cranford Company laid a foundation base over the slab

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<sup>79</sup> David J. Howell and Son, Engineering, *George Washington Memorial Association Topographical Map of Site and Surroundings Memorial Building, Alexandria, Virginia*, 31 Mar. 1922, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>80</sup> *Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 21 Jul. 1922, ECMB, 25, GWMNMA Archives. Cranford Paving Company was awarded the contract for excavating the hill with a bid of \$37,500.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Carswell, "Memorial Tower Built to Last Through Ages," *Engineering News-Record* 100 (5 Apr. 1928): 543-544.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel E. Moran, "Report on the Soil Test," 5 Oct. 1922, 6-7, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>83</sup> Carswell, 544.

<sup>84</sup> Percy Cranford to Helmle & Corbett, 15 Feb. 1923, Cranford Papers, GWMNMA Archives.

composed of Conway pink granite and, by December 7, 1922, the main foundation walls, the girders for the entrance steps, south terrace and the north terrace foundations were all in place.<sup>85</sup>

At the time of the Association's annual convention early in 1923, it was estimated that the base course would be done by August. The board of directors requested that Corbett produce a building program with the costs of successive steps in order to keep contracts moving and work continuous. With the schedule and related costs, the Association was also made aware of the total amount needed to complete the building—estimated then at over \$2 million. Over the next nine years, the building was finished in a series of campaigns with the first being the completion of the ground- and first-floors in the podium and the mezzanine, which formed the base of the tower, followed by successive campaigns to finish the tower with contracts let floor by floor. Between 1923 and 1927, the podium and mezzanine were completed although interior spaces were unfinished, remaining as rough concrete or terra cotta tile. The only finished interior architectural elements installed were those that also had a structural purpose: the monolithic Doric columns of Conway green granite in the ground-floor Assembly Room; the fluted Doric columns of Missouri golden vein marble in the auditorium; and the massive Composite columns in the Memorial Hall, each composed of three sections of Conway green granite.<sup>86</sup>

The tower was completed between 1928 and 1931. As with the rest of the building, construction dragged on longer than necessary as funding was available and materials were acquired. The granite on the exterior was not just facing, but also functioned as part of the form for the poured concrete. The blocks were supported by lumber bracing and concrete poured between them and temporary wooden forms. Bronze anchors imbedded in the granite blocks secured them to the concrete once it set; the concrete was poured in sections equal to about two courses of stone.<sup>87</sup> In time, a monolithic, stone and concrete structure emerged. Work slowed again during the first half of 1930 when the pyramid at the top of the tower was redesigned to carry the weight of six-ton chimes. Work on the tower was completed in February 1931 with the installation of the large aluminum finial.

While the tower was still under construction, other areas of the GWMNM began to receive attention. The concrete roofs were covered with waterproofing material and, in November 1930, a roof drainage system was installed at the same time that interior plumbing and sewer lines were being roughed in. In December 1930, the Benjamin F. Shaw Company won the bid for the installation of the heating and ventilating systems and the Cranford Company received the

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<sup>85</sup> The information in this paragraph was drawn from the following sources: Charles Carswell, "Memorial Tower Built to Last Through Ages," *Engineering News-Record* 100 (5 Apr. 1928): 544-546; Cranford to Helmle & Corbett, 15 Feb. 1923, Cranford Papers, GWMNMA Archives; Cranford Paving Company, *Foundation Concrete Pour Plan*, 1922, GWMNMA Archives. The Cranford Paving Company was contracted to lay the granite foundations on October 27, 1922.

<sup>86</sup> *Minutes of the Twentieth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 13 Dec. 1924, ECMB, 80, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>87</sup> The information in this paragraph was drawn from the following source: "General Specification for Granite Concrete Backing and Interior Concrete Work," Nov. 1923, Bid Specifications, GWMNMA Archives. This was a delicate manner of construction and the specifications also stated: "Care must be exercised in pouring concrete so that granite is not disfigured, if through accident, there shall be an overflow or out flowing of concrete, through joints, it shall be immediately removed by washing with clean water, under no conditions must cement be allowed to set on the finished surfaces of stone."

contract for constructing the boiler house and related tunnel. By July 1931, the executive committee began approving additional electrical, plumbing, plastering, and marble work on the interior. The auditorium and the two lobbies adjacent to it were plastered and received marble stairways, carpeting, furniture, and other flooring. Elsewhere within the building shell, rooms were being roughly partitioned with hollow terracotta blocks. Early in 1932, the ceiling of Memorial Hall was in the process of being plastered.<sup>88</sup>

At the time of the building's May 1932 dedication, the auditorium was entirely finished with the fixtures, seating, drapery, wood flooring, carpet, and other furniture installed. The Memorial Hall was an unfinished concrete space with an unpainted decorative plaster ceiling. The tower was not yet enclosed with windows and the interiors were wholly unfinished with rough concrete and terracotta tile. Despite the incomplete interior and economic depression, it can be said that the freemasons had met their goal of building a memorial to George Washington without an extended break in construction or the incursion of debt.

### **Landscape Design**

At the second board of directors meeting in September 1921, the same meeting in which it was decided hire an architect for the building, Andrew L. Randell suggested that the Association also employ a landscape architect and the board empowered the executive committee to do so.<sup>89</sup> Executive committee member, Melvin Johnson consulted with the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Massachusetts about the landscape and firms to consider for the project. Upon hiring Helmle & Corbett to design the building, the executive committee authorized the firm to work with Olmsted Brothers on the model-proposal. The Association approved the scheme and Helmle & Corbett contracted with Carl Rust Parker, a freemason as required by the Association, of Olmsted Brothers for the landscape design.<sup>90</sup>

By May 1922, Louis Watres had approved the selection of Parker as the landscape architect and he and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. visited the site in order to get a sense of its topography.<sup>91</sup> The contract gave Olmsted Brothers control over the work schedule, allowing them to determine when certain landscape plans were created and implemented. Their first plans were for the major grading and terracing, which would be the only element of the landscape fully realized by the firm (fig. 4). While the Association hired Olmsted Brothers to create an entire landscape design for the site, this element always suffered in the budget. Without proper investment, the Association continued to delay the development of its grounds.

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<sup>88</sup> The information in this paragraph was drawn from the following sources: New York Roofing Company to Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, 17 Nov. 1930, GWMNMA Archives; DC Engineering Co. to Cranford Paving Company, 11 Nov. 1930, Cranford Papers, GWMNMA Archives; *Minutes of the Forty-Eighth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 25 Jul. 1931, ECMB, 177, GWMNMA Archives; *Minutes of the Twenty-First Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1931), 13, GWMNMA Archives; *Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 7 Feb. 1931, ECMB, 160, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>89</sup> *Minutes of the Second Board of Directors Meeting of GWMNMA*, 12 Sep. 1921, BDMB, 11, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>90</sup> *Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 26 Nov. 1921, ECMB, 17, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Carl R. Parker to Keiper, 29 May 1922, GWMNMA Archives.



By July 1928, S. Eugene Osgood, the consulting architect, thought Olmsted Brothers were trying to terminate their contract and demanded that the firm “furnish plans and specifications covering the entire landscape scheme.” In response, Parker not only stated that the firm would not continue to prepare plans until the Association was serious about moving forward with that element of the project, but also requested payment due the firm for work already completed:

When the Association is ready to proceed with further landscape work, we shall be ready and willing, of course, to proceed with the preparation of further plans, specifications, etc. as they may be needed. You must realize as well as we do that it is a waste of time and money for us to prepare detailed plans for portions of the work not yet determined upon, until such time as the Association is ready to go ahead with this work. As I have repeatedly stated, a general grading plan was prepared a number of years ago and has been on file with the Association for a long period and as the work has progressed the necessary detailed plans and specifications have been made. Our contract states very clearly that we shall receive 10% of the cost of the landscape work actually constructed and that in event the work is held in abeyance, we are to receive the above mentioned remuneration of \$15,000. Not only has the \$150,000 been spent on the work, but the work has been held in abeyance.

There is nothing in our contract which states that we shall provide a complete set of working drawings and specifications for all work to be done on the project before the work is ready to proceed.<sup>92</sup>

With a line drawn in the sand—the Olmsted Brothers refusing to produce a complete working plan until they felt it would be implemented and the Association unwilling to fully commit to that aspect of the memorial—the development of a full landscape plan for the site suffered. A planting scheme, for example, was never created. Still, it should be noted that some of the elements of Parker’s plan that were completed—the terraces and a blue Potomac stone retaining wall on the first terrace near King Street—were significant ones. And a number of other, more mundane Parker-designed elements were executed, including: the moving of telegraph lines, installation of pipelines, drainage, roads, and a parking lot, and seeding and general maintenance of the grounds.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Cornerstone and Its Ceremony**

Louis Watres had hoped the cornerstone would be laid in the autumn of 1922. The laying of the cornerstone was not just a simple process of placing a dated stone within the building. For freemasons, it was an intensely meaningful ceremonial and symbolic celebration and one of the few rituals that occurred in public. It had become an expected part of the construction process of not just Masonic buildings, but also many civic buildings; for their memorial to George Washington it was of even greater gravity. The laying of the cornerstone for the GWMNM was delayed one year because excavation on the site did not begin until June and work on the foundations only commenced in October. At its convention early in 1923, the Association

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<sup>92</sup> Parker to Osgood, 24 Jul. 1928, Olmsted Letters, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Parker to various recipients, Olmsted Letters, GWMNMA Archives.

determined that the event would occur sometime between November 1 and November 12, to be determined by the board of directors.<sup>94</sup>

The Association thought it fitting that their national memorial should have a cornerstone ceremony having a national scope. The board of directors, for example, invited President Warren G. Harding to attend. For more detailed decision making, the board ceded responsibility to its executive committee. In June 1923, it was reported that the committee had hired freemason, A. P. Johnson of Grand Rapids, Michigan as a publicity director to produce materials and disseminate information about the ceremony scheduled for November 1, 1923.<sup>95</sup> Johnson devised a campaign intended to foster interest in both the cornerstone ceremony and the project as a whole. Towards this end, he sent out four different mailings to each lodge and visited several Masonic jurisdictions, at a cost estimated at \$13,000 that included his salary, clerical staff, and the production of materials.<sup>96</sup>

The hiring of a publicity director allowed the executive committee to focus on planning and coordinating the program for the cornerstone ceremony. The committee decided to use the ceremonial trowel used by Washington at the laying of the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol and also have replica trowels made for each Grand Master as well as President Harding and Chief Justice William Howard Taft. Each Grand Lodge, then, would have a lasting reminder of their participation in this national endeavor. A replica trowel would also be used in ceremony by the Association president, the U.S. President, and the Chief Justice to spread the concrete and would be preserved in the museum.<sup>97</sup> The planning of the cornerstone proceeded smoothly until issues arose about the design of the cornerstone and President Harding died unexpectedly.

A cornerstone bearing an inscription designed by Corbett was delivered in July 1923 to the executive committee, which found the design lacking. The inscribed emblem consisted of the year and a Masonic square and compass without a "G" at center, a conventional Masonic abbreviation standing for geometry, God, or Grand Architect of the Universe. The missing "G" displeased the committee as a whole and several members thought the emblem was too small. The committee then made a motion to have the "G" added and for the architect to submit an exact size rendering for their approval. However, by the next day, J. Claude Keiper expressed to Louis Watres his doubt of Corbett's ability to produce a satisfactory stone and wrote to Eugene Osgood, the consulting architect: "I told him [Louis Watres] that Corbett, on account of his limited experience, could be of little or no value in deciding the matter, while your wide experience qualified you to do so, and made the suggestion that you handle the question."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 16, GWMNMA Archives. The Board of Directors would later decide on November 1, 1923 as the date for the cornerstone ceremony.

<sup>95</sup> *Minutes of the Eleventh Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 22 Jun. 1923, ECMB, 48, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>96</sup> *Minutes of the Twelfth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 26 Jul. 1923, ECMB, 51, GWMNMA Archives. The final decision of enacting this plan was given to President Watres who permitted the program.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>98</sup> Keiper to Osgood, 27 Jul. 1923, Osgood & Osgood Papers, GWMNMA Archives. Osgood & Osgood had designed at least fifteen Masonic temples by this time.

Osgood was placed in charge of the design for the cornerstone and it varied from Corbett's in several ways. Corbett's design included a border at the edge of the stone, emphasized the year "1923," and minimized the Masonic symbol, the square and compass, which also lacked a "G." Osgood's design emphasized the Masonic emblem, now including a "G," and made the year of secondary importance.<sup>99</sup> He also eliminated the border so that the cornerstone would be better integrated with the other stones in the wall. Despite having an approved design, there was anxiety about obtaining another cornerstone in time for the ceremony. The committee asked the contractor to see if the rejected stone could be used by turning it around and smoothed for the new inscription; unfortunately, this was not possible and another had to be ordered from New Hampshire. The new stone arrived in time, but the inscription had to be done onsite.

The other issue was getting the President of the United States to participate in the cornerstone ceremony. In August 1923, President Harding died, and his successor, Calvin Coolidge, immediately began declining invitations to participate in various public ceremonies. On August 29, 1923, Keiper met in person with President Coolidge who tentatively accepted the invitation to attend the ceremony. In a letter to James G. Frey, Keiper discussed his meeting with the President, recounting:

I had a most enjoyable interview with him on the subject and think we are to be congratulated on inducing him to accept, for he is uniformly declining all other invitations...Omit any reference to the probability that the President will speak. It was only after I had suggested his attendance without making an address, that he agreed to come.<sup>100</sup>

Major issues resolved, the Association was ready for the cornerstone ceremony on November 1. A parade began at eleven in the morning, processing along King Street and up Schuter's Hill to the building site. The parade included approximately 20,000 participants, including mounted police, and military and naval forces with their bands. The governor of Virginia, mayor of Alexandria, and other municipal officials also participated. The rest of the parade consisted of the affiliated Masonic groups including the Knights Templar, the Imperial Potentate of the Shriners and his escort, and freemasons from lodges across the United States as well as other countries. In addition to these groups and individuals, three specific local lodges were specially invited: Fredericksburg No. 4, where Washington was made a freemason; Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, where he was Master; and Potomac Lodge No. 5, which participated in the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol, at which Washington officiated. The parade ended with the members of the Association.<sup>101</sup>

Thousands of spectators attended the parade.<sup>102</sup> The cornerstone ceremony began when President Coolidge and his wife, along with Chief Justice William Howard Taft, were escorted to

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<sup>99</sup> Osgood to Keiper, 17 Aug. 1923, Osgood & Osgood Papers, GWMNMA Archives. The dimensions of the square and compass were nearly 22" in height and the numbers approximately 5" in height.

<sup>100</sup> Keiper to James G. Frey, 4 Sep. 1923, GWMNMA Archives. This letter is a clear example of why Calvin Coolidge received the nickname "Silent Cal".

<sup>101</sup> J. Claude Keiper, *Laying the Stone: Minutes of a Special Meeting of the GWMNMA*, Nov. 1923, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Exact numbers were unknown because the Association did not have the means to regulate the crowds, although they did express a desire to provide a count.

the memorial site. Upon their arrival, an artillery salute was sounded from the naval ships on the Potomac River and military aircrafts flew over the site.<sup>103</sup> Next, Charles H. Callahan, Acting Grand Master for the ceremony, took the tiny silver trowel used by Washington at the cornerstone ceremony of the U.S. Capitol and placed cement on the area where the stone would rest. This action was then repeated by President Coolidge and Chief Justice Taft.<sup>104</sup> The other Grand Masters of the United States were then invited to use their replica trowels to spread cement.<sup>105</sup> Following the ceremonial application of cement, the stone was laid and speeches were made commemorating the event, praising Freemasonry, and honoring George Washington.

### **The Dedication of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial**

The dedication date of the GWMNM—May 12, 1932—was not arbitrarily chosen nor did it truly reflect its completion. The date of the dedication was linked to a national program established by Congress in 1925. A joint session of Congress established a commission to arrange a national celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of George Washington. On February 22, 1927, President Coolidge addressed Congress and the nation about this endeavor, stating:

concerning plans for the proposed celebration and to express the hope that the States and their political subdivisions under the direction of their governors and local authorities would soon arrange for appointing commissions and committees to formulate programs for cooperation with the Federal Government. When the plans begin to be matured they should embrace the active support of educational and religious institutions, of the many civic, social, and fraternal organizations, agricultural and trade associations, and of other numerous activities which characterize our national life.<sup>106</sup>

The nation had five years to prepare for the bicentennial celebration, which was not intended to be a World's Fair-type event or exposition discussing the importance and memorializing Washington. Rather, as chairman of the commission, President Coolidge envisioned a series of events to be held throughout the country and even worldwide that broadened Americans' knowledge of George Washington, and position him as something greater than a general and first president.<sup>107</sup> This program undoubtedly put pressure on the Association to complete the memorial. At the 1929 convention, Louis Watres stressed that the GWMNM "must be completed before the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's birth shall be celebrated."<sup>108</sup> Within a year, members of the executive committee were working with the Bicentennial Commission to have the dedication of the memorial on the ten-month program. The committee requested a week for the dedication and related Masonic activities and were assigned the second week of May 1932.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Douglas D. Martin, "Laying the Stone," *Detroit Masonic News*, reproduced in Keiper, *Laying the Stone*, 31, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>104</sup> This was President Coolidge's only active part of the ceremony.

<sup>105</sup> Keiper, *Laying the Stone*, 6-7.

<sup>106</sup> Calvin Coolidge, "Address on Birth of George Washington," *The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington*, U.S. Senate, 69<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> (22 Feb. 1927), 33-34.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>108</sup> *Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1929), 11, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>109</sup> *Minutes of the Forty-Third Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 29 Nov. 1930, ECMB, 158, GWMNMA Archives; *Minutes of the Forty-Fifth Meeting of the Executive Committee of GWMNMA*, 25 Mar. 1931, ECMB, 167, GWMNMA Archives; Carl E. Claudy to Keiper, 10 Oct. 1931, GWMNMA Archives.

On Thursday, May 12, 1932, the large parade, celebration, and dedication ceremony that the Association had planned for nearly two years was met by continuous pouring rain. At nine-thirty in the morning, approximately 20,000 freemasons marched along a parade route lined with largely empty bleachers as most spectators chose to stay on the train platforms. The weather prevented the dedication ceremony to be held outside and, instead, it was held in the newly completed auditorium. As with the laying of the cornerstone, the dedication was attended by the U.S. President, Herbert Hoover, and his wife. A twenty-one gun salute from the battery and naval vessels in the Potomac marked President Hoover's arrival. A model of the building was uncovered and the Masonic dedication ceremony began. First, a gold pitcher filled with corn was poured over the model, dedicating the building to Freemasonry. Second, a silver pitcher filled with wine was poured over the model, dedicating the building to virtue. Third, a silver pitcher filled with oil was poured over the model, dedicating the building to universal benevolence. Next, the Grand Master of Virginia explained that, in addition to these three objectives, the building was dedicated to the memory of "America's greatest son and Masonry's brightest star – Washington" with the Grand Master of each state offering a message honoring Washington. In conclusion, Melvin M. Johnson gave an address and the dedication ceremony came to a close.<sup>110</sup>

Several newspapers covered the dedication ceremony and an article appearing in the *Washington Post* provided a succinct summary of its significance:

Perhaps the most heartening fact about the service yesterday is that it marks the conclusion of a splendid co-operative effort on the part of men of every class and condition representing every part of the Nation. Like the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages, the modern Masons have toiled and sacrificed together that the noble structure now consecrated might be raised.<sup>111</sup>

The reporter was not entirely correct in observing that the ceremony marked a conclusion as much work remained to be done. The pointing of the exterior walls continued in the months that followed and it would be decades before the interior spaces were fully completed.

## **6. Alterations and additions:**

Although the building was dedicated in 1932, it was not complete, but rather was largely a finished shell with an unfinished interior. Only the auditorium, restrooms, and lobbies outside the auditorium neared a state of completion and even portions of these lacked paint, wall coverings, moldings, fixtures, windows, sculpture, and furnishings. The focus of the Association during the first decade of work was on primary construction, not finishing interior spaces; however, even before the dedication, Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray were already giving attention to plans for the Assembly Room, Memorial Hall, three lodge rooms on the first floor, fittings and finishes in the stairwells, and the elevators.

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<sup>110</sup> *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (May 1932), 56-68, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>111</sup> "The Masonic Memorial," *Washington Post* 13 May 1932: 6.

The Great Depression severely impacted the execution of these plans, a situation made all the worse in June 1932 when the Cranford Paving Company dissolved and the Association had to take on the firm's debts related to the memorial building. As the Depression carried on, donations from freemasons declined as did the number of active members. The Association concentrated on meeting the obligations of existing contracts related to the construction of Memorial Hall, pointing the exterior, and maintenance. The building's interiors would not be completed until after World War II, and not in the manner initially envisioned as a number of spaces would be given over to auxiliary Masonic groups and did not necessarily support the Association's mission to memorialize George Washington.

## **B. Historical Context**

### **Freemasonry in the United States, 1900-1930**

While its exact origins remain obscure, Freemasonry or, more commonly, Masonry was an outgrowth of medieval masons' guilds of the British Isles.<sup>112</sup> Before the eighteenth century, two types of Masonic lodges had emerged: operative and speculative. The operative lodges were, essentially, the trade guilds made up of laboring masons. The speculative lodges probably began as operative lodges, but in time shifted from a place to learn the skill of masonry to a place for the exchange of ideas. During the Enlightenment, speculative Masonry began to attract a variety of prominent men including scientists, philosophers, and members of the nobility. In 1717, four lodges in London formed a grand lodge to supervise the work of individual lodges and this event is understood as the beginning of organized Freemasonry.<sup>113</sup> Over time, freemasons used the language and the tools of operative masonry as symbols in the creation of a ritualized, secret fraternal organization.<sup>114</sup> As with other ideas and organizations, Freemasonry traversed the Atlantic with the English who settled the American colonies.

To properly address the historiography of American Freemasonry, it must be studied through regional lenses as it was not a centralized institution, but one loosely connected through common language and ritual practices. Settlers from England, Scotland, Wales, or Ireland arrived with a charter in hand to establish a new Masonic lodge in the area they settled. Therefore, depending on settlement patterns, populations, and type of people who came to a particular region, Freemasonry either became quickly established or it was not a significant organization in an area. As with other English institutions, Independence and the Revolutionary War forced the restructuring of Freemasonry; however, since it was not directly linked to the English Crown, Freemasonry did not face as much difficulty in the transition. It continued to grow in popularity into the early-nineteenth century, but slowed in the 1820s as anti-Masonic sentiment swept the nation originating in the Morgan Affair.<sup>115</sup> This backlash against Freemasonry decimated its

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<sup>112</sup> Freemasonry or Masonry can be used interchangeably.

<sup>113</sup> Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons Three Centuries of Building Communities*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>114</sup> In calling Freemasonry a "secret" fraternal organization, secret means exclusive in that members are expected to only talk about certain ritual-ceremonial practices and teachings with other members. The sharing of these things only between members creates a bond between them.

<sup>115</sup> William Morgan (1774-1826?) was a periodically employed brick mason and became a member under false pretenses as he sought to make money by publishing an exposé on Masonic ritual. He was briefly imprisoned for what were likely trumped up debt accusations and after being released on bail was kidnapped by a group of men

numbers and it was not until the 1840s that it began to rebuild, and shifted from an elite fraternal organization to one more firmly rooted in middle-class culture, which was burgeoning at that time.

At the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, Freemasonry still was a way for middle-class men to escape and enjoy comradeship with others sharing similar ideals and outlook. The Masonic temple was a space secluded from the world they engaged in daily. It was a place where they participated in ritual, and were entertained and educated, independent of their wives and families. Besides being an escape from what was understood to be a profane world, the Masonic temple was also a location where men tried to improve themselves morally through ritual and education. In many ways, Freemasonry promoted to its members the late-Victorian middle-class ideology of being moral and behaving in a proper manner.

Between 1900 and 1930, Freemasonry entered a significant period of change. As the nation grew and expanded economically, a younger generation found aspects of Freemasonry that had previously been a draw for prospective members antiquated or obsolete. Leisure time could be filled with any number of commercialized pursuits, such as theatres, nickelodeons, baseball games, and bars for entertainment. Widespread public secondary education and increased enrollment at colleges and universities provided vastly improved educational opportunities. To some, the moralistic code of Freemasonry of moderation and temperance was not appealing in an age that increasingly glorified consumption.

Still, even in this period of change, the number of men involved in Freemasonry continued to grow and would peak at over three million by 1930.<sup>116</sup> The potential decrease in membership due to aspects of Freemasonry that did not appeal to some was counterbalanced by relaxing the rules for induction and a shift in emphasis from moralism to patriotism. What had been an insular fraternal organization, became one having a larger external purpose. In the past, Freemasonry's connection with the outside world was in having its members keep the three Masonic tenets—brotherhood, wisdom, and charity—an active part of their lives.<sup>117</sup> This ideal was expanded and reinterpreted in the early decades of the twentieth century by younger freemasons who felt that Masonic tents could be more concretely employed to help solve society's problems. This shift in outlook was closely linked to period Progressive ideologies and, while laudable in its social concern, still reflected white middle-class ideals, a cohort increasingly worried about immigration and rapid change. These Americans became preoccupied with nativism and defining the boundaries of American "normalcy."<sup>118</sup> All of these impetuses worked to draw Freemasonry into the civic world.<sup>119</sup>

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and never seen again. The freemasons were accused of Morgan's disappearance and the event was sensationalized in the contemporary press. Tabbert, 58-65.

<sup>116</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture 1880-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 225.

<sup>117</sup> Tabbert, 13.

<sup>118</sup> "Native" in the Progressive period was a concept held by a large portion of white, middle-class, largely Protestant Americans who saw their way of life and beliefs as the ideal for American society.

Future President Warren G. Harding coined the phrase "Return to Normalcy" during his campaign for president. The word "normalcy" emphasizes the ideology of the period, in that there was a "state or fact of being normal" as codified by Americans in this period. *Webster Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, "Normalcy", 806.

<sup>119</sup> Dumenil, 126.

To be a freemason in the early twentieth century not only meant an individual was respectable and had a good moral character, but also that he was also a good citizen, active in the community, and committed to promoting American ideals of democracy, equality, and justice. Of course, since Freemasonry was not a centralized fraternal organization, as the Rotarians were, there was no real consistency on how these lodges went about promoting Americanism.<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, the common thread of civic participation and a white middle-class concept of the founding of the United States provided a general framework for Freemasonry. It was these elements of service, knowledge of Early American history, and citizenship that appealed to the many of the men in this period and helped to keep an old institution modern and relevant to a younger generation.

### **George Washington: The Idea, The Man, The Mason**

Every generation perceives George Washington in a way that serves its own outlook. While new perceptions of Washington are created, previous notions do not entirely disappear. Washington was an American icon in his own lifetime, as a surveyor, general, Commander and Chief of the Continental Army, and, most obviously, the First President of the United States. In the early-nineteenth century, the American public viewed Washington somewhat paternalistically, as a patrician who had responsibility to care for those of a lesser status and to lead by example. His primacy as an American model diminished in the trauma of the Civil War, and the subsequent assassination of Abraham Lincoln and in his transformation into a national martyr.<sup>121</sup> The awakening of interest in American history in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries included a reassessment of Washington's life and accomplishments. Romantics stressed and promoted the humanity of Washington.<sup>122</sup> Rising nationalism and patriotism positioned Washington as not only an icon to be emulated, but also a man who had been attuned to all Americans. Washington's expanding cult of personality resulted in a wave of writings, speeches, and discussion about him. In a period characterized by increased immigration, expanding industrialization, political corruption, and perceived threats to democracy, Washington was a figure of comfort and inspiration.

To better understand Washington "the man," biographers and scholars of the early-twentieth century were most interested in clarifying the historical record and making Washington into a figure that modern Americans could relate to and, in turn, look to for inspiration in their daily lives. Contemporary writers frequently placed Washington on a pedestal; as noted in a recent history, "in the twentieth century, as in the nineteenth, Washington was a lamp for, as well as a mirror of, the times."<sup>123</sup> For example, in a December 1921 issue of *Current Opinion*, an article entitled "Revealing George Washington as a Pioneer Captain of Industry" the author addressed how Washington was "the first American millionaire, if not multi-millionaire."<sup>124</sup> Washington did this, according to the article, through land speculation and the management of his farms,

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>121</sup> Barry Schwartz, "George Washington: A Man for a New Century," in *George Washington American Symbol*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New York: Hudson Hill Press, 1999), 127.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>124</sup> "Revealing George Washington as a Pioneer Captain of Industry," *Current Opinion* LXXI (Dec. 1921): 819-20.



fisheries, and a flourmill. Washington was praised for his entrepreneurship, a quality highly valued at the time the article was written.

Continuing along these lines of promoting Washington the man in addition to heroic figure, the Commission for the National Bicentennial Celebration of the Birth of Washington chaired by President Calvin Coolidge stressed a broader interpretation of Washington. In a February 1927 address, President Coolidge stated that the general view of George Washington was romanticized. He emphasized Washington was great because he “was a man endowed with what has been called uncommon sense, with tireless industry, with a talent for taking infinite pains, and with a mind able to understand the universal and eternal problems of mankind.”<sup>125</sup> These qualities created and nurtured his leadership abilities as both General and President. Still, as President Coolidge continued, there was more to Washington, “from earliest youth Washington showed a disposition to make the most of his opportunities. He was diligently industrious – a most admirable and desirable, if seemingly uninteresting, trait.” From these highlights, President Coolidge saw Washington, as an inspiration for the nation not just a military commander and president, but for his business sense and adeptness at seizing opportunities as they arose.<sup>126</sup>

This emphasis on Washington’s qualities as a man outside of politics and war caused many groups throughout the United States to claim Washington as one of their own. Freemasonry was one of the first organizations to endorse their affiliation with Washington. It was general knowledge that Washington was a freemason. He began his Masonic career in November 1752 at the age of twenty in a Fredericksburg, Virginia, lodge, and about a year later in August 1753 he became a Master freemason, or full member.<sup>127</sup> Since he became a member of Freemasonry in his early twenties, many freemasons saw his actions in later life as implementations of the teachings of Freemasonry, which “inculcates into its members a system of ethics and morality” that, in a sense, it made a man a better individual.<sup>128</sup> This ideological system also promoted the idea that each member is an equal. Even when a man was promoted to Master, head of the lodge, he served his term and returned to being an equal among all in the membership. Therefore, when Washington resigned his commission as Commander in Chief in 1783 or ended his presidency after his second term and returned to Mount Vernon as a private citizen, his actions were later interpreted as the implementation of these same Masonic principles. Charles Callahan, author of *Washington the Man and the Mason*, stated:

No man or set of men can truthfully aver, without impugning his veracity or doubting the sincerity of his declarations on the subject, that Washington was other than an earnest, zealous member of the Craft, loyal to its principles and true to its teachings, to the close of his life.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Coolidge, “Address on Birth of George Washington,” 34.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>127</sup> William D. Moore and John D. Hamilton, “Washington as the Master of His Lodge: History and Symbolism of Masonic Icon,” in *George Washington American Symbol*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New York: Hudson Hill Press, 1999), 75.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>129</sup> Charles H. Callahan, *Washington the Man and the Mason*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington D.C.: National Capital Press, Inc., 1913), 279.

By claiming Washington's actions as the embodiment of Masonic principles, freemasons felt they held a great responsibility in promoting George Washington, the man, and, ultimately, the freemason. He was, in the view of the Association, "one of the brightest luminaries in the Masonic constellation."<sup>130</sup> In the same way that other period sources discussed such virtues as freedom, equality, and tolerance as they related to Washington, freemasons further positioned them as being fundamental parts of their organization and the establishment of the United States. As with previous generations of Americans and freemasons, those involved with the construction of the GWMNM continued to view George Washington as both the embodiment of larger American ideals as well as ones specific to their own time.

### **The Development of a Modern Aesthetic for Tall Buildings**

By the late-nineteenth century the United States was one of the most industrialized nations in the world; its governmental policies and cultural values were in flux, technological advancements were occurring at a dizzying rate, and business and manufacturing were both expanding and shifting, geographically and otherwise.<sup>131</sup> After a century of architecture dependent on period revivals, Americans began searching for an appropriate representation of the new modern American landscape. The main area of experimentation was in commercial architecture, which prior to the 1880s was not a predominant focus of architects.<sup>132</sup> The rise of big business and corporations transformed urban commercial buildings into new symbols of the capitalist and industrial nation the United States had become. These commercial buildings were unlike anything before because they utilized the new technology of steel-frame construction that allowed them to soar to unprecedented heights. The impact of commercial design affected not only the urban American landscape, but also other areas of American building design as architects sought to establish modern American architectural representation.

Most of the architects receiving the largest and most important commissions were trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, either directly at the École des Beaux-Arts or in a firm whose principals were trained there. Beaux-Arts training stressed the knowledge of past architecture for design inspiration. It was also a comprehensive approach taking in all elements of building design from the form to circulation to the minutest of details. While buildings were meant to serve the modern needs of a rapidly expanding nation, their success was as much based in beauty as functionality, an aesthetic emphasis that, more often than not, relied on past architectural trends and models.<sup>133</sup> For example, the designers of the "White City" at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago showcased technological and industrial advancements in a luminous Beaux-Arts landscape framed by buildings having a clear link to Renaissance classicism. Except for the notable exception of Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building, the architects of the Columbian Exposition did not consider ornamenting the buildings in a non-historical manner because they would not have been viewed as beautiful or an appropriate representation of the place of the United States in the world.<sup>134</sup> American modernity as demonstrated by the

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<sup>130</sup> *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of GWMNMA* (1923), 9, GWMNMA Archives.

<sup>131</sup> Larry R. Ford, "Reading the Skylines of American Cities," *Geographical Review* 82 (Apr. 1992): 180.

<sup>132</sup> Deborah Frances Pokinski, *The Development of the American Modern Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 28.

<sup>133</sup> This is not to say that period architects intended to literally recreate the past, but rather use knowledge of past architecture to solve modern architectural problems.

<sup>134</sup> Pokinski, 23, 27.

Columbian Exposition presented America as a country that was technologically advanced and innovative, but also educated and cultured.

Drawing on historical precedent created a conundrum for architects when it came to the exterior treatment of the tall commercial buildings that came to be known as “skyscrapers.” Their boxy form and proportions were unlike anything in the past. Although architects mainly in Chicago developed a “tall building aesthetic” as revolutionary as the structure itself, most American architects contented themselves with applying familiar historical elements to a new building form. They relied on an organizational philosophy that can be described as base-shaft-capital, the “base” being the articulation of the lowest floors most visible along the streetscape, the “shaft” being the relatively simple masonry or terracotta cladding used for most of the floors above the base, and the “capital” being the articulated cornice and decoration of the uppermost floors at the top of the building. With this arrangement, the designers of early skyscrapers not only mined the past for actual architectural details, but also employed an abstracted representation of classical columns and Order.

Even as architects continued to draw inspiration from the past, they debated and discussed the idea of defining an architecture that capitalized on the innovative skyscraper. The continued use of classical elements and organizing principles were highly questioned because the buildings for which they were devised had a horizontal emphasis.<sup>135</sup> In the 1910s, since its historical purpose was to reach skyward, architects began turning logically to Gothic architecture, most notably with the 1913 completion of Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building, the first “cathedral of commerce.” Despite its appeal to architects and relatively easy application, Gothic skyscrapers were still criticized for the functional disconnect between them and Gothic cathedrals. As with skyscrapers inspired by classicism, Gothic ones were also maligned for the eclectic application of historical imagery to a thoroughly modern form. A solution for this disconnect slowly unfolded with the setback skyscrapers built in New York following the 1916 zoning resolution, but was also significantly influenced by international design competition sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1922 for its new headquarters.<sup>136</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* newspaper ran a design competition for a new headquarters building and received over two-hundred sixty entries. John Mead Howells and Raymond Hood submitted a design for a building with Gothic elements, which, despite the historicist imagery, had a light and modern expression that deemphasized the corners, the traditional areas of buttressing. Still, to many the winning design was a safe and comfortable one felt to be appropriate to architecturally represent the newspaper.<sup>137</sup> The competition entries were published in a volume in 1923 and some of the other entries also generated a great amount of discussion and were ultimately influential on later building design.<sup>138</sup> The second place entry by Finnish architect Eliel

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>136</sup> Carol Willis, “Zoning and “Zeitgeist”: The Skyscraper City in the 1920s,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (Mar. 1986): 49. For more on the Tribune Tower, see: Katherine Solomonson, *The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Skyscraper Design and Cultural Change in the 1920s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>137</sup> Pokinski, 45.

<sup>138</sup> *The International Competition for a New Administration Building for the Chicago Tribune, MCMXXII; Containing All the Designs Submitted in Response to the Chicago Tribune’s \$100,000 Offer Commemorating its Seventy Fifth Anniversary, June 10, 1922* (Chicago, 1923).

Saarinen, in particular, was much talked about and had direct and indirect influence on a number of 1920s skyscrapers in America, such as Ralph Thomas Walker's Barclay-Vesey Building (1923) and even competition winner Hood's own Radiator Building (1924), both in New York. The competition also helped to redefine the use of the word "modern" with regard to buildings, moving it from a word used interchangeably with "contemporary" to something "Modern" in style and aesthetics.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time the form of skyscrapers was being impacted by the entries in the *Chicago Tribune's* high-profile competition and by those meeting the requirements of New York's 1916 zoning resolution, an entirely new and Modern design aesthetic was transforming other aspects of commercial architecture. Paris's 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* revolutionized all aspects of world design to the extent that the aesthetic movement was known in English as "Art Deco." Art Deco drew on geometric forms, native and exotic motifs, abstracted flora and fauna, among other sources, in the creation of sometimes fantastical buildings and spaces that were unlike anything that came before. Art Deco not only resulted in a vast array of applied and integrated ornament for buildings, but also utilized modern materials such as aluminum, stainless steel, and Bakelite and modern technological advancements such as indirect lighting and, increasingly, cool air conditioning.

The merger of new forms and a new design aesthetic resulted not just in such iconic New York buildings as William Van Alen's Chrysler Building (1928-30; National Historic Landmark, 1976) and Shreve, Lamb & Harmon's Empire State Building (1929-31; National Historic Landmark, 1986), but in striking towers defining the skyline of most major American cities. The ingenuity shown earlier by architects in the successful and not-so-successful merger of historical style and skyscraper design became the basis for the development of a truly Modern high-rise aesthetic whose character became an indivisible part of the American identity.<sup>140</sup> The design of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial is a significant and unique example of the national obsession with tall buildings and modern forms and details in the 1920s and 1930s.

The massive corporate towers that popped up in cities across the country are the better known examples from the period, but institutions as far ranging as governments, universities, civic organizations, and even religious groups expressed their modernity and presence in the urban fabric through skyscrapers. While the individual impetuses for constructing their new state capitols varied, the high-rise examples constructed in Lincoln, Nebraska (Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, 1919-32; National Historic Landmark, 1976), Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth, 1929-32; National Historic Landmark, 1982), and Bismarck, North Dakota (Joseph Bell DeRemer and W.F. Kurke with Holabird & Root, 1931-34) were all conceived as

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<sup>139</sup> Pokinski, 51-52.

<sup>140</sup> As with their nineteenth-century predecessors, world's fairs and expositions in the twentieth century were also venues for experimenting with Modern architecture and advanced technology. Architects involved with creation of modern skyscrapers were often involved with contemporary design of world's fairs, including major players like Harvey Wiley Corbett and Raymond Hood. The 1933-34 Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago and the 1939-40 New York World's Fair not only provided unparalleled platforms for investing modernity and Modernism in all their facets, but influentially packaged it for mass, public consumption. At a time of dire economic straights for the nation and the fast-approaching clouds of world war, these events provided both a temporary escape from the present and a vision of an optimistic future through science, technology, and modern design.

powerful representations of modern government and progress for their respective states. The forty-two story Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh (Charles Klauder, 1921-34) was touted in the period press as “the world’s first skyscraper university.”<sup>141</sup> It was believed that such a building would foster a spirit of unity among students, faculty, and staff, and create thousands of square feet of new space at less cost. On the West Coast, Seattle’s newly-formed Washington Athletic Club hired Sherwood D. Ford to design a twenty-one story clubhouse for its membership, completed in 1928-30, which was part of a trend for urban men’s clubs in the 1920s. In 1923-24, the First United Methodist Church of Chicago opted to stay at their historic site in Chicago’s Loop and constructed a twenty-three story building (the “Chicago Temple Building”). The church hired Holabird & Roche to design the building, which was crowned with an opulent Gothic tower thought to appropriately reflect both the congregation’s history as well as its contemporary mission. To a twenty-first century observer, Alexandria, Virginia, is, perhaps, an unlikely location for a set-back skyscraper and it is unlikely that the building form would be utilized today for a national memorial; however, against the backdrop of the national mania for tall buildings in the 1920s the design outcome was entirely logical. The sleek setback tower rising up from Schuter’s Hill remains a striking and highly visible memorial to a freemason whose significance to the nation is unrivaled.

## **Part II: Architectural Information**

### **A. General Statement:**

1. **Architectural character:** Perched austere and somewhat whimsically on top of one of the high hills ringing Washington, DC, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial is a building that cannot be missed in the landscape. It is an exercise in contrast whose primary forms are successfully, if uncommonly, merged (fig. 1). The lower portion, or podium, is dominated at the front by a monumental Doric order portico, which conveys a timelessness and strength that is ubiquitous to American memorials and public buildings. Rising out of this solid base is a surprisingly modern form, a tower with a series of setbacks and simple details capped by a pyramidal crown worthy of an Art Deco skyscraper. Interior features, fittings, and finishes that evoke both traditional classicism and modernity carry this dual character throughout the buildings principal public spaces.
2. **Condition of fabric:** Very good.

### **B. Description of Exterior:**

1. **Overall dimensions:** The podium (ground- and first-floors) of the Memorial measures approximately 168' x 240', including the apse and the portico for the east-west dimension.
2. **Foundations:** Poured in place reinforced concrete and granite with integrated granite cladding.
3. **Walls:** Poured in place concrete faced in granite. The lower portion of the podium walls and the

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<sup>141</sup> “University Erects 40-Story Building,” *The Washington Post* 26 Jul. 1931, sec. R: 6.

tower are composed of coursed ashlar framed by water table at ground level and a stringcourse between the ground and first floors. The upper portion of the podium walls above the stringcourse are lightly rusticated with smooth-faced, ashlar blocks separated by raked joints. The entablature at the top of the wall, a parapet, is embellished with a denticulated cornice and a frieze composed of segments of a Greek key motif separated by rosettes.

The ashlar masonry walls of the base of the tower, which provides visual and structural transition between the podium and tower, is accented at the corners with lightly rusticated courses topped by plaques featuring swags and a rosette. The plaques are integral with the frieze running under the denticulated cornice that is composed of blocks having textured faces. Each of the three stages of the tower are similarly composed with double height openings framed by a row of piers and engaged piers that step out at the middle of the ashlar masonry walls. The piers and window openings in each stage extend between a stringcourse and a denticulated cornice, both of which step out from the wall plane. There are three openings per stage at the front and back and three, four, and five openings from top to bottom on the sides. The Order of the bottom stage is Doric, the middle is Ionic, and the top is Corinthian.

4. **Structural systems, framing:** Poured in place reinforced concrete beams and walls with integrated granite cladding.
  5. **Openings:**
    - a. **Doorways and doors:** The sets of double doors in the podium are set within frameless openings. They are bronze, and embellished with decorative studs and windows with muntins arranged in a geometric starburst pattern frequently seen in classical revival civic buildings in the first decades of the twentieth century.
    - b. **Windows:** The windows in the ground-floor of the podium are set within frameless openings. They are square and screened by decorative bronze grilles having the same geometric starburst pattern as in the podium doors. The first-floor windows of the podium are each contained within a tabernacle frame embellished egg-and-dart and stylized acanthus motifs. The rectangular openings are also fitted with bronze grilles similar to the ground floor. The spaces framed by the engaged piers on each stage of the tower are fitted with bronze-framed windows and window grilles similar to those used in the podium.
  6. **Roof:** Built-up membrane roof on flat areas. The pyramid that crowns the top of the tower is composed of bands of granite alternating with openings fitted with louvers/screens. The pyramid terminates in a stylized Art Deco beacon.
- C. **Description of Interior:**
1. **Plan:** The building is composed of two parts: the podium and the tower. The podium consists of two principal stories that contain most of the public spaces, the offices, and service and support areas. The rooms on both levels are arrayed around large central spaces, the Grand

Masonic Hall (historically the “Assembly Room”) on the ground floor and the Memorial Hall on the first floor (fig. 2).

On the ground floor, a continuous corridor fully encompasses the sunken Assembly Room and provides access to a series of rectilinear rooms situated along the outside of the building. On the building’s east and west sides, the corridor descends from both directions to a landing, which provides access to the Grand Masonic Hall. Four stairs descend from the first floor, two at the front and two at the rear. At the rear of the building, a semicircular corridor arcs around the auditorium/theater (Memorial Theater), connecting the rear stair lobbies. This corridor provides access to the orchestra level of the theater.

While the first floor follows the same general spatial disposition as that of the ground floor—a series of rooms arrayed around the outside of the building with a major space (Memorial Hall) occupying the center—movement through the floor is distinct because of functional differences. On the ground floor, nearly all the rooms are accessible from the main corridor, which runs entirely around the center. As Memorial Hall is the primary focus of the interior, all public circulation passes through the space, sequentially moving from the portico, into the entry and front stair lobbies, to the raised aisles on either side of Memorial behind the columns, to a corridor connecting back to the rear stair lobbies and the ambulatory around the rear of the theater. This arrangement of circulation not only provides public links from the front door and the theater via Memorial Hall, but also effectively isolates the North and South lodge rooms, whose principal points of access are reception rooms entered from the rear stair lobbies. The floor also contains the Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 Replica Lodge Room. It is located to the south of the main entrance and is mirrored by a regalia room on the north.

The tower, which can be accessed via elevators up from Memorial Hall or a spiral staircase, has seven principal levels, each of which is, more-or-less defined by a single major space. Each set-back stage of the tower is composed of a lighted, two-story space situated behind the piers and windows with a one-story, windowless mezzanine level below (fig. 3). The first stage contains the MOVPER Grotto exhibit on the mezzanine (third floor) and the George Washington Museum (fourth floor). The second stage contains the Royal Arch Chapter exhibit on the mezzanine (fifth floor) and the Memorial Library (sixth floor). The third stage contains the Royal and Select Masters (Cryptic) exhibit on the mezzanine (seventh floor) and the Knights Templar exhibit (eighth floor). The room at the base of the pyramid above the third stage contains the Tall Cedars of Lebanon exhibit (ninth floor). The pyramid itself has two levels, a lower one that primarily houses the elevator equipment and an upper level, which initially housed the chimes and now contains radio transmission equipment.

## **2. Flooring:**

**Ground floor:** The floors of the principal rooms and corridors are terrazzo. The stairs descending to the Grand Masonic Hall are marble. Some of the ancillary rooms have carpet or other flooring laid over the concrete, or plain or painted concrete.

**First floor:** The floors of the public spaces, corridors, and stairs are marble. Some of the ancillary rooms and passages have carpet, cork, or other flooring laid over the concrete, or plain or painted concrete.

The concrete floors in the tower are variously covered with terrazzo, stone, carpet, and cork.

3. **Wall and ceiling finish:** The general wall and ceiling finish is plaster. Hollow terracotta blocks are used throughout the building to wall off the interior space.
4. **Doorways and doors:** The ground-floor doorways have simply molded marble architraves. The first-floor doorways are also marble. Some are the same as on the ground floor, others are more ornate. The frames in Memorial Hall around the main door and flanking doorways into the gift shop and tour guide spaces are marble tabernacle frames. The standard solid door used throughout the building is wood and features a single panel set off by molding. Bronze, fully-glazed doors are used in Memorial Hall on the first floor and at the front and rear stair lobbies on the ground floor.
5. **Trim and woodwork:** The principal rooms and circulation spaces feature green marble toe molding. The molding used elsewhere in the building varies from room to room.
6. **Mechanical:** The building was equipped with standard utilities at the time of construction: water, sewer, electric, and heat. These have been upgraded as necessary over time. There is steam heat throughout the building. There is no central air conditioning; however, most spaces in the building are air conditioned in some manner through individual units and zoned systems.

The building was designed to include two elevators in the tower with shafts/tracks on a 7.5° incline. Because of the building's stepped profile, standard, fully vertical elevator shafts were not feasible as they would have been positioned at the center of Memorial Hall on the first floor. These were not installed until the late-1940s. The original elevator winches and associated machinery exist at the top of the building at the base of the pyramid.

The original six-ton electric chimes once housed in the pyramid have been removed. The space now contains radio equipment for the City of Alexandria and transmission equipment for cellular phone systems.

7. **Landscape:** No other building in Alexandria, Virginia, commands a greater presence than the George Washington National Masonic Memorial, and it is the combination of architecture, siting, and landscape design that makes for an unmatched visual landmark. It stands atop Schuter's Hill at an elevation just over 100 feet on a highly irregular parcel bounded by King Street and blocks of single-family houses in the George Washington Park subdivision to the north; multiunit housing complexes, two disused reservoirs, and Duke Street to west and south; and Callahan Drive and King Street to the east. During the Civil War, prominent Schuter's Hill was the site of Fort Ellsworth, which was part of the Union's line of defense for Washington. The location of the fort was to the west of the Memorial and archeological investigation is ongoing on the property.



The Memorial sits at the apex of the hill, facing east on axis with King Street, the principal commercial thoroughfare in Old Town Alexandria (fig. 4). It is set within a stone perimeter wall having the same footprint as the building's podium, which is broken by stairs/walks at entrances on the north, south, and east. On the east (front) elevation, a broad flight of stairs descends from the portico and terminates at a wide platform covered in stone pavers. A second, even broader flight of stairs descends to the front drive, which curves up the hill from Callahan Drive below. A retaining wall to the east of the drive indicates the edge of the uppermost level of the original, Olmsted Brothers-designed terracing, a cascading lawn down the east side of the hill. The four lower terraces are three sided, the angles of their sides paralleling King Street to the northeast and Callahan Drive to the southeast, the latter of which also parallels the adjacent railroad tracks. The original plans depict retaining walls where the terraces step down; however, these were not executed except for the uppermost level along the entrance drive and low walls at the bottom along King Street and Callahan Drive. The middle four terraces are defined by short, 45° degree lawn-covered hills.

An undulating, double walkway on axis with King Street provides pedestrian links between the drive at the top of the hill and Callahan Drive at the bottom. The original landscape plan included a similar feature, but different in intended execution. The design may have been changed when the retaining walls for the middle terraces were abandoned as the appearance of the planned stair was closely linked with these walls. A traffic island standing at the foot of the stair was also part of the original landscape concept. Although today more irregular in shape, its functional purpose remains the same—to control traffic at the complex intersection of the main driveway, a significant bend in King Street, Russell Road, and Callahan Drive. The plan also included another traffic island in front of the railroad station; this landscape feature also survives in an altered state.

The entrance drive that sweeps up the hill was constructed more-or-less as planned as was the small parking area on the north side of the building. The landscape plan shows the drive exiting on what is now Park Road in the George Washington Park subdivision, which was being developed at the same time that the Memorial was under construction. The present rear entrance connects with Carlisle Street, rather than Park Road, via a large parking lot located to the northeast of the building. A third, small parking area, not shown in the original concept for the landscape is located to the south of the building and reached by a drive connecting to the large lot. The now-empty reservoirs to the southwest of the building and grounds are very much visible from inside the building, but are at a slightly lower grade and screened by a copse of trees at ground level on the exterior.

No detailed planting scheme was ever developed for the site. The landscape plan shows an open expanse of lawn, with groupings of trees on the perimeter, and thicker stands at the rear. Today, the landscape contains greater expanses of open lawn than shown on the plan. Trees were shown at regular intervals along King Street, and these appear to have been planted based on surviving specimens. The most significant departures from the general landscape concept as depicted are a

considerable number of memorial trees, each with its own granite name stone placed on the ground in front of the tree, and the massive Masonic “Emblem” of the square and compasses with an inset “G” that is positioned on the third and a portion of the fourth terrace. This feature was dedicated in 1999 and oral tradition suggests that its scale was set by a desire for it to be seen from airplanes landing at nearby National Airport.

### PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### Abbreviations used in the footnotes:

BDMB	Board of Directors Meetings Binder
ECMB	Executive Committee Meetings Binder
GWMNMA	George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association
GWMNMAI	George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, Incorporated
MJBDMB	Melvin Johnson Board of Directors Meetings Binder
MJECMB	Melvin Johnson Executive Committee Meetings Binder

**Bibliographic note:** Individual committee reports and the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Annual minutes will not be listed individually in the bibliography; however, will be referenced individually in the footnotes.

The minutes for the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association were not published; the subsequent ones were published. The minutes consulted for this report can be found on the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association website ([www.gwmemorial.org](http://www.gwmemorial.org)) in the “Digital Archives.”

#### *Manuscript Primary*

*1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association.* 1921. BDMB. George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association Archives. Alexandria, Virginia.

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**PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION**

The project was co-sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service and the Society of Architectural Historians, as the Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship, and the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. The documentation was undertaken by HABS, Richard O’Connor, Chief of Heritage Documentation Programs, under the direction of Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. The project leader was historian James A. Jacobs. The documentation was completed during the summer of 2010 in Washington, DC, and Alexandria, Virginia, by Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow Kate M. Kocyba (University of Missouri). The large-format photography was produced by HABS photographer Renee Bieretz. Special assistance provided by Mark A. Tabbert, Director of Collections, George Washington Masonic Memorial.

**APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS**



**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:**

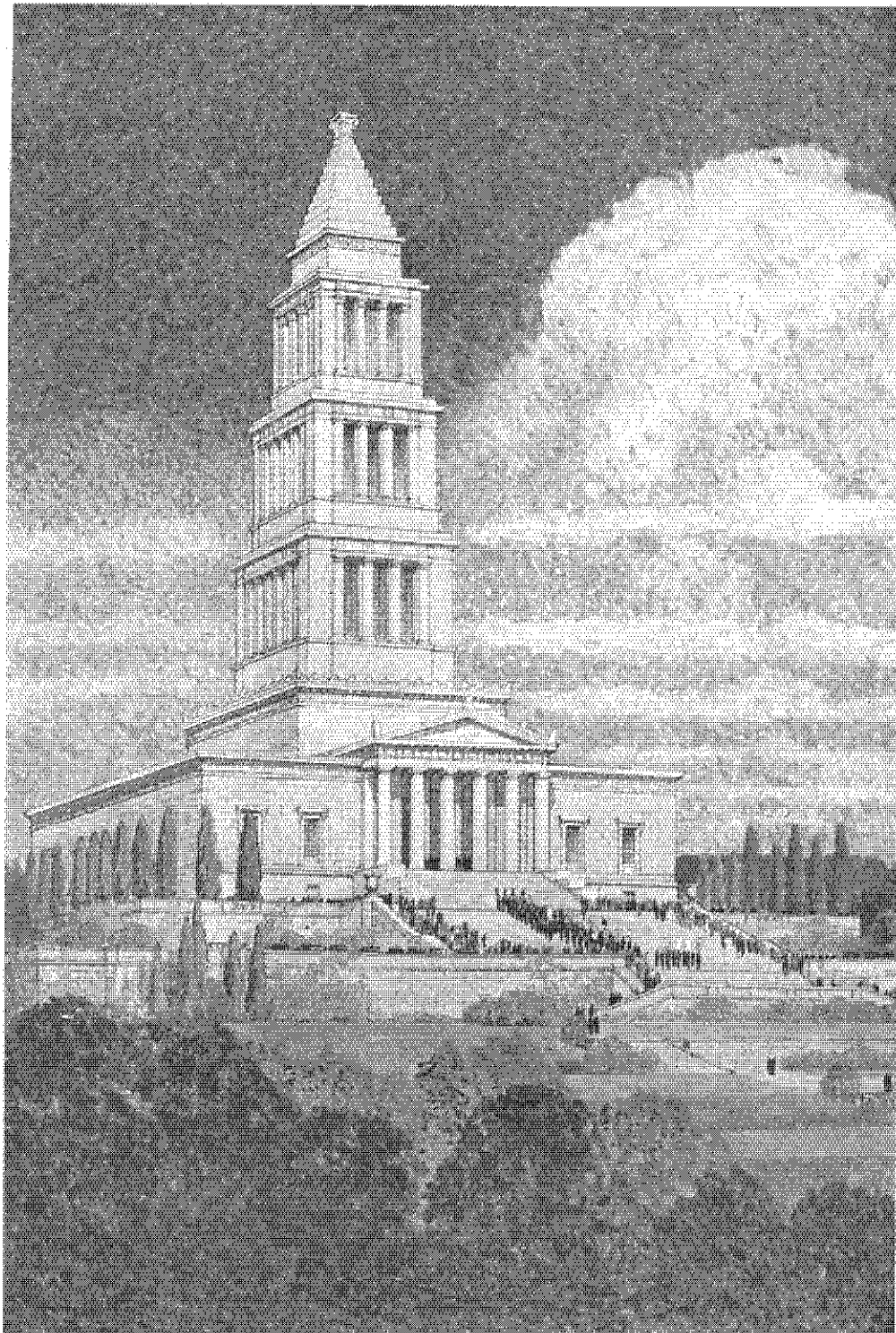
The illustrations were drawn from a promotional publication: *The George Washington Masonic National Memorial* (New York: Kalkhoff Co. for the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, 1925).

**fig. 1.** Perspective rendering

**fig. 2.** First-floor (main floor) plan

**fig. 3.** Section; note the division of space in each of the stages of the setback tower

**fig. 4.** Site plan



THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL

**fig. 1**

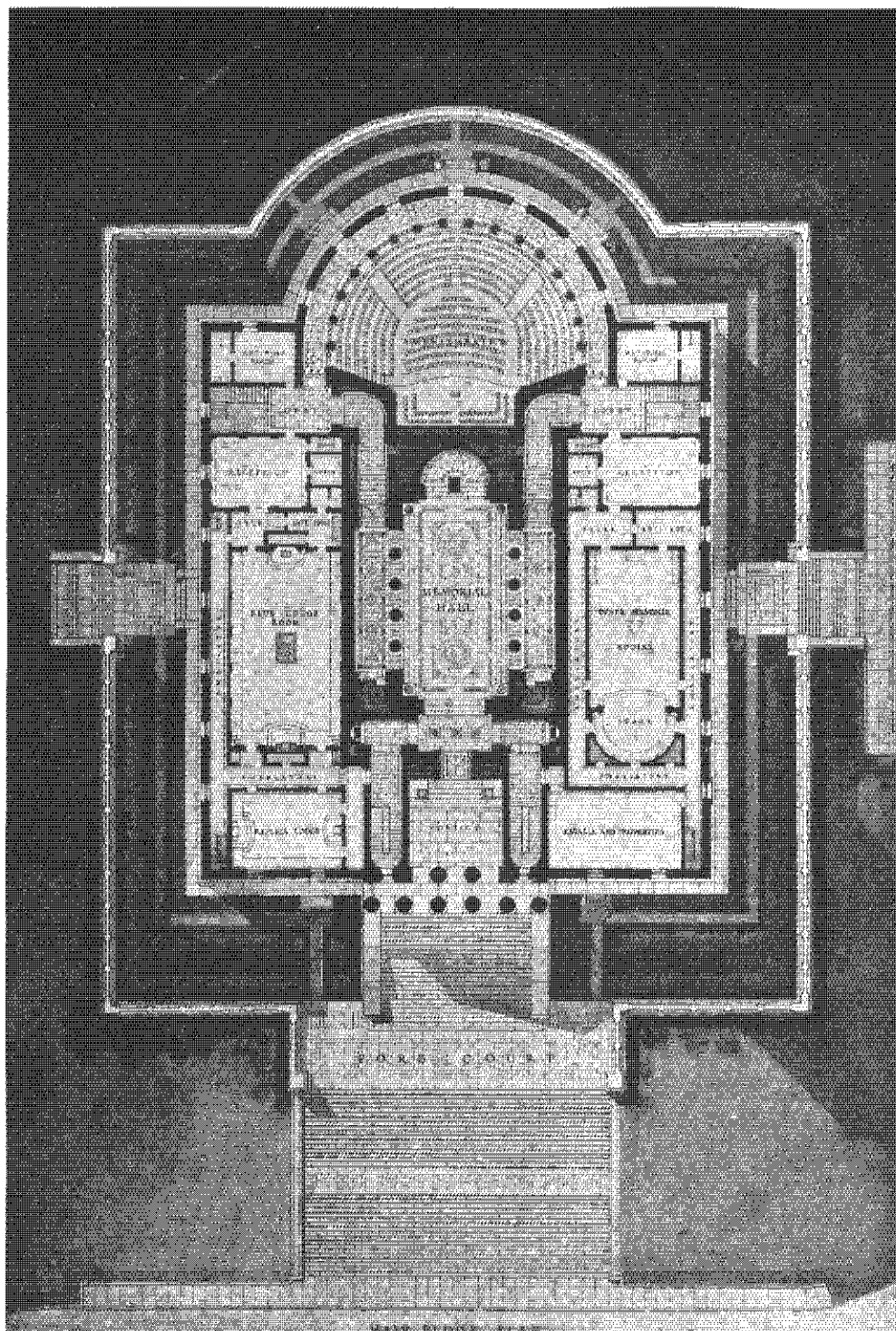


fig. 2

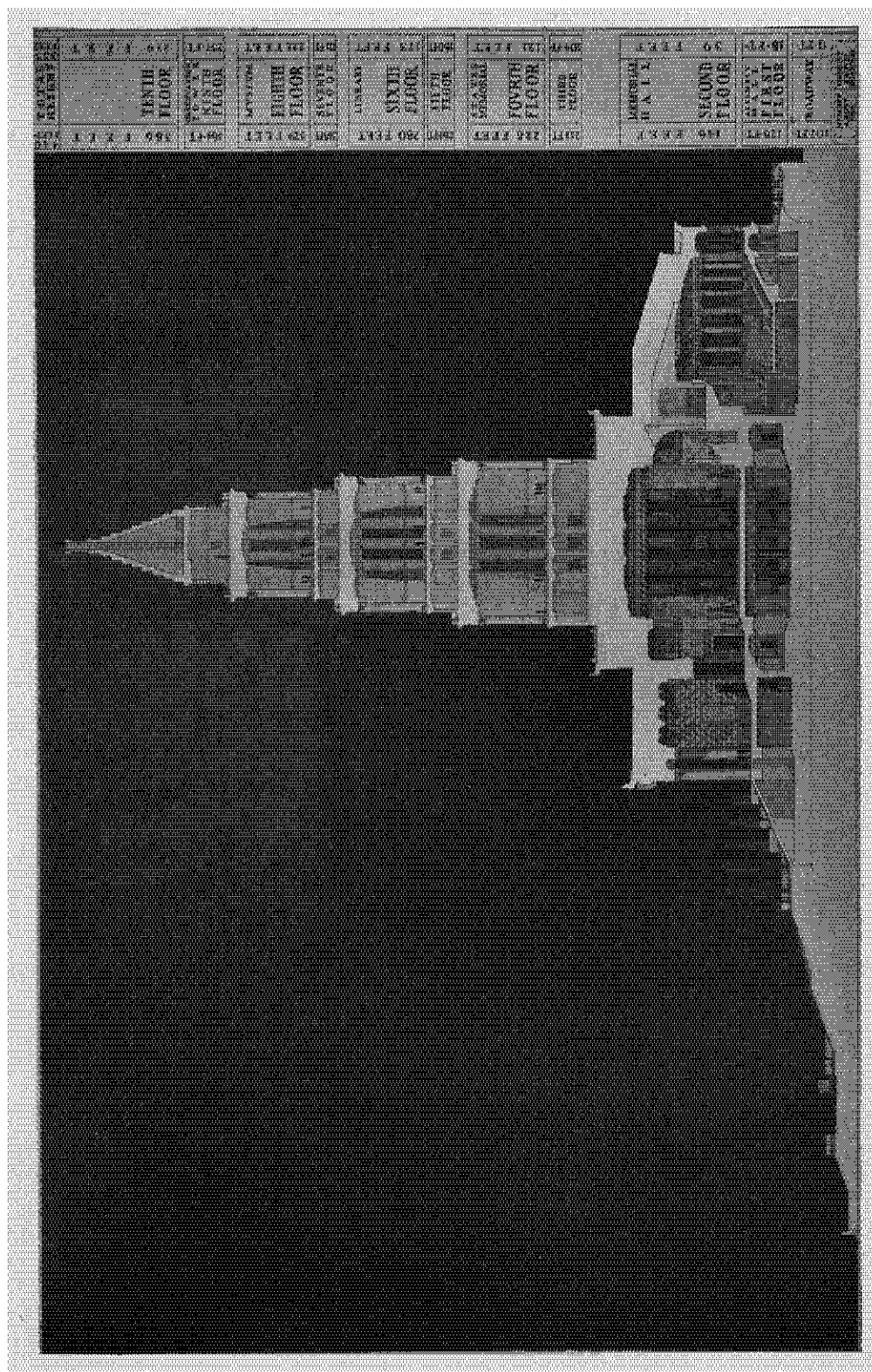


fig. 3

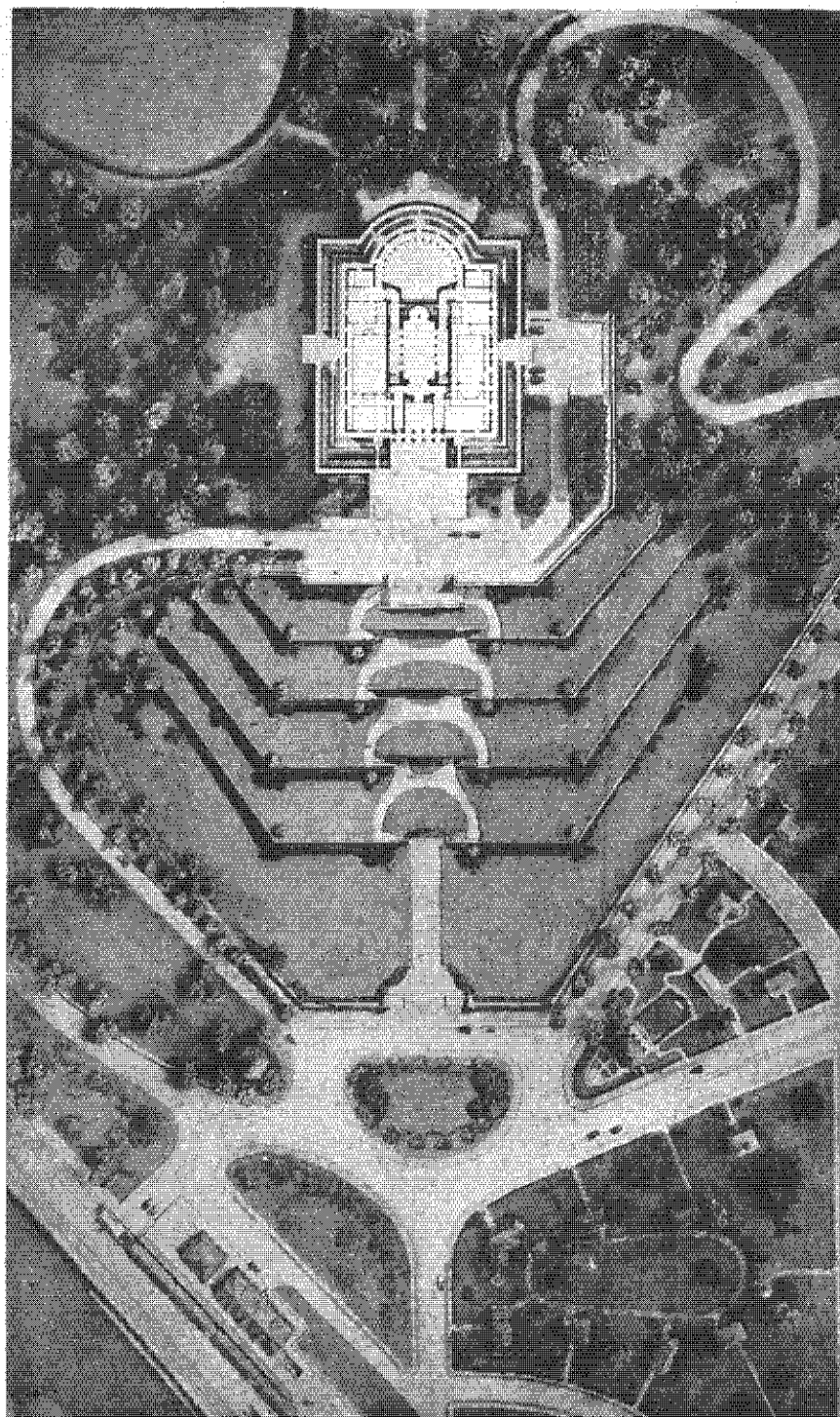


fig. 4